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ZOE'S 'BRAND.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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ZOE'S 'BRAND.'

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"RECOMMENDED TO MERCY."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1864.

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BY THE AUTHOR OF

"RECOMMENDED TO MERCY"

CHARLES KENNEDY

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ZOE'S 'BRAND.'

CHAPTER I.

"O slavery! thou frost of the world's prime,
Killing its flowers, and leaving its thorns bare!
Thy touch has stamped these limbs with crime;
These brows thy branding garland bear;
But the free heart, th' impassive soul,
Scorn thy control."

ON that evening, between the hours of nine and ten, Mr. Davenport Seymour called by appointment on Mrs. Gordon, and remained with her in close and earnest conversation till the midnight hour had long since struck. What passed between them during that lengthened interview will be best explained by repeating a conversation held two days afterwards in the privacy of Charley Seymour's apartments at the St. Louis Hotel, between that young gentleman and his elder brother.

"That's a wonderful fellow — that man they call Link Morse," was Davenport's opening remark, while busied in lighting a prime regalia.

"A wonderful brute," responded Charley, puffing out a cloud of smoke with rather unnecessary vigour.

"Brute or no brute," continued Davenport, "he

seems to be making good running for Gordon's daughter; and it's a disgusting thing to see; for the girl's a good girl as well as a beautiful one, and meant for better things than to be the mistress of a low-bred, drunken slave speculator like that."

Charley did not answer this tirade for several minutes, but when he did, it was in the slow, concentrated tones which generally mean mischief.

"*His* mistress! — Miss Gordon the mistress of that snivelling, dirty Yankee! Ha, ha — the joke's too good by half — why, man, what put such an idea as that into your head?"

"What would have put it into yours, if you hadn't been blinded by your own passion. Now, Charley, don't get into one of your boyish rages, old fellow. I'm twenty years your senior — nearly old enough to be your father; and you ought to know by this time that your happiness is as dear to me as my own."

He paused, as if waiting for a reply, but as none came, he continued boldly, and with a total disregard to Charley's probable anger, which was not without its effect.

"Charles, I think you cannot be blind to the fact that Mrs. Gordon is dying."

"Zoe does not think so," said Charley, in a low tone.

"Perhaps not, but that does not alter the reality, which is, that not only is she dying, but dying with her spirit tortured by many cares — those concern-

ing her daughter being the heaviest and most unendurable."

"I do not see why she should make herself uneasy about Zoe, unless the woman has an idea that the girl may fall into the jaws of that lean-visaged male harpy; and of the total impossibility of that it may be as well to assure her."

"By suggesting, I suppose, the 'Scylla,' which, by avoiding 'Charybdis,' will probably be the fatal alternative of that poor, unsuspecting girl! Charley! have you the heart to do this thing? Can you reconcile it to your sense of honour to take that 'one little ewe lamb' from the dying mother when —"

"When there is a whole flock to choose from. Well, I grant you that our famous 'Institution' provides us amply with a stock of easy beauties, from whom we may select our temporary companions. But," he added, dropping the light tone he had assumed, and speaking with an energy that almost startled the sober-minded Davenport, — "But we are speaking now of Zoe Gordon, and her name must not be mixed up with those who can be bought and sold — those whom we nightly meet with in those dens of female corruption — the Quadroon balls, where mothers parade their children before the highest bidder for that priceless thing — their virtue!"

"Poor creatures! Poor, degraded, miserable souls! And, as you say, Charley, Zoe Gordon must not — cannot — be classed with women such as these. At the same time — now, hear me patiently, for I am

appealing to you at the request of one who has a right to speak in the poor child's defence. At the same time — and whilst fully admitting Zoe Gordon's claims to admiration and respect — the question must arise, and — and — be decided, Charley, between us two to-night: What is to be the end of your — your flirtation with Jaspar Gordon's daughter?"

A cloud — heavy and portentous — passed over the young man's face, and he was about to answer in terms which even a brother such as Davenport would have found it difficult to forgive, when the latter stopped him by repeating still more impressively than before, that he was but the agent and emissary of a woman — and that woman one whose dying prayer could hardly be rejected.

"Her mother — well — I had not thought of her, poor woman! But, Davy, you must know as well as she does, that here, even if I would, I could not marry her, and that — that by taking advantage of Zoe's love — I speak of it in the strictest confidence, and without coxcombry, to you alone — by taking advantage of that poor child's love, I should but save her from an otherwise inevitable fate — the fate of becoming the mistress of some cold-hearted sensual brute, who would cast her adrift with scanty ceremony when the novel passion was spent, and a fresh object of attraction had come across his path."

"Then I am to conclude," began Davenport, sadly —

"Conclude nothing but that I adore the very

ground that Zoe Gordon treads on! Conclude nothing but that far from injuring her in word, or thought, or deed, my life is spent in forming projects for her happiness!"

"A happiness in which I fear religion and virtue have little share."

"There you wrong me. There you wrong us both," cried Charley, eagerly. "You do not know — you cannot imagine the angelic purity of that girl's mind. You may doubt it," he continued, still more excitedly, for a remembrance of his own fair young wife had called a rather meaning smile to his brother's lips. "You may doubt the fact that one of that poor race of Pariahs — a woman of the blighted South — can be a model of perfect womanly modesty; but you must remember that Zoe was not educated in a country where the fruit of knowledge is plucked early from the tree — her mind was not enlarged betimes by witnessing and hearing of all the vices so common in our sin-infested climate — her heart — but enough of this — the time may come when you will do more justice to this daughter of a poor Quadroon; for you, with all your broad philanthropy, have prejudices, my good brother — prejudices against the loathed negro race — prejudices which I, too, was born with, but have shaken off, thank God, in foreign travel, and in converse with the more enlightened of mankind."

"And the result of this *dégourdissement* is to —"

"To convince me that a nobler, truer, purer wife than Zoe Gordon may one day be to me, does not live

to bless the home of one whose love will never fail her! God bless her, Davy, and guard her for me in her sweet virgin loveliness, for I have sworn to leave her free while that poor woman lives — sworn to her that when she has left home and country to follow me to distant Europe, a priest of her own faith shall join our hands, and then — oh, Davy — what a life of bliss we have before us. A warm heart from the sunny South, virtue in which to trust, and children reared where the deep curse of slavery rests not on the land, and young, fresh natures cannot be degraded by the spectacle of its many evils.”

“You have drawn a pleasant sketch,” said Davenport, after a pause. “But you have forgotten, or rather probably you are in ignorance of two circumstances, which, if delineated rightly, would form a somewhat gloomy background to the picture.”

“And these circumstances are? —”

“The fact that Jaspar Gordon is a gambling bankrupt on the verge of ruin, and that his daughter Zoe — the girl whom you would make your wife — is still a *slave*.”

At this piece of intelligence, for which he was evidently unprepared, Charles Seymour sprang with an almost convulsive movement from his chair, exclaiming, as he did so —

“Good God! Can this be possible? Gordon ruined! and his daughter — no, no, this cannot be — his daughter — that fair, delicate girl still liable to the laws which give one man the power of disposing, for

no fault or crime of theirs, of the liberties of their fellow-creatures! Davy! Can this be true? And if so, tell me when and where you learnt this dreadful news."

"From the voice of common rumour, confirmed by my own searching investigations, and last of all, from the lips of Mrs. Gordon herself, who, two days since, invited me to her house, in the hope that I would advise her how to act in this great emergency."

"Two days ago, and this is the first that I have heard of it? Davy, was this kind or brotherly? Was it doing as you would be done by to keep such knowledge from me, when you guessed — when you might have felt certain indeed, that to me it would be a matter of such vital import?"

"I could not help it. It was owing to no neglect, or fault of mine, but to circumstances over which I had positively no control. An engagement, long since entered into, obliged me to go down the river as far as Carroll's Plantation. As he is selling land and stock in order to leave the country, I could not put him off; and you, my dear fellow, were nowhere to be found, carefully as I sought for you."

"True," said Charley, reseating himself as though partially mollified by this explanation. "True; I was absent for several hours yesterday morning. Would to Heaven it had not been so. But Zoe's horse had grown to be too much for her, a hard-mouthed brute with the devil's own temper, and I went out beyond Pontchartrain to look at a young mare I thought would

suit her. Poor child! and she is still — Good God! I cannot say the word, and Gordon is — a scoundrel, for whom no name is too opprobrious, for thus delaying to provide for an emergency which might at any day occur. Davy, it is enough to make the iciest blood boil up to fever-heat within the veins, to think the man can live and sleep in peace, knowing that should he die in debt his child will be the property — the *property*, like the rest of her race — the goods and chattels — God! — it nearly drives me mad — of any man who bids for her with the vile dross called dollars.”

“I cannot wonder at your irritation, only, I own, not being in love with the young lady myself, that the mere fact of her beauty does not greatly aggravate the atrocity of such cases. Gordon’s neglect and supineness are perfectly unjustifiable; no fresh instance, however, of the utter recklessness of our Southern nature can surprise me. Nowhere is life, for many causes, so uncertain; and yet in no part of the civilized world do men so utterly neglect to make provision for the future.”

“But I do not understand,” said Charley, musingly, “how the hopeless ruin you talk of can have been brought about; and still more impossible is it to conceive that the same lavish expenditure and boundless hospitality — the same apparent possession of ready money to an unlimited extent can still exist, when, as you imply, this man’s estate is mortgaged to the utmost, and ruin is staring him in the face.”

"As to the 'ruin,' that is easily accounted for in the old way; namely, European travel, with its ostentatious display of Croesus-like wealth. And then the hotel life at home, with its card-playing, its hazard, and its billiard-rooms. To say nothing — although that should have been mentioned first and foremost — of the constant habit of always trusting to a good crop — living up to and beyond their means — borrowing to the extent of their credit for negro-stock — going ahead without thought or reflection for the future; and finally, as is the case with our friend Gordon, finding his mortgages bought up by a low moneyed man like John Link Morse, who threatens to foreclose, and —"

But Charley had heard enough, the danger hanging over the head of his adored Zoe broke upon him with overwhelming force, and without so much as a farewell word to his brother, he seized his hat, and hurried from the room and from the house.

CHAPTER II.

"All evil thoughts and deeds;
Anger and lust and pride;
The foulest, rankest weeds
That choke life's groaning tide —

"These are the woes of slaves;
They glare from the abyss;
They cry from unknown graves,
'We are the witnesses!'"

"MY Pauline, my dear-loved friend, at last I have good news to send you. At last I can answer your inquiries by saying that I am happy. Happy, my *bien aimée*! ah! could you but see me in this earthly paradise — see me with those I love around me — my mother, my own beautiful mother, whom I have often described to you as I thought that I remembered her, but who is in reality so far above all words of mine to paint. And then the luxury of our life! — the glorious, ever-shining sun; the flowers heavy with a perfume unknown in colder lands, for at this moment, whilst I write to you, the very air outside seems laden with the breath of thousands of violets, with jessamines and budding roses. And yet it is only March. But such a March! None of the cold east winds we can remember, sweeping round the corners when we went slowly and in pairs to church, and came back blue and pinched to the scant Sunday dinner at the dear

old *Pensionnat*. For the place is still most dear to me, my Pauline. Dear, for 'twas there I knew you first, *ma chérie* — there that your good, kind brother came to take us — giddy, foolish children that we were — to the beautiful old château amidst the silent hills, where we were both so merry and so glad. For I was happy there too, Pauline; and sometimes, even when I think my heart is full to overflowing with new hopes and joys, a memory of the dear old place steals over me, and well-nigh turns my smiles to tears. For weeks after I had arrived here, Chérie, my heart was very heavy. Between us the broad ocean stretched so wide and wild, restless and angry, like (whose words are they that I quote?) an endless menace from the Great Omnipotent. And then I feared that you and Monsieur Alfred would forget me — it is so likely in that great distracting Paris, where nothing can remind you of poor absent Zoe. But since a few weeks, Pauline, I have been comforted, for my mother has been growing better and far stronger. Last week, the first time for many, many days, she went out quite alone to drive; and though she stayed out long, she was not tired, at least not very; and in the evening she sat up to hear me sing and talk to Mr. Seymour. I wrote you once about him, *chère* — the gentleman who often comes to see us here; and — ah! Pauline, I did not think to tell you more, but it is such a happiness to open out the heart to one who loves us; and Charles Seymour, he is a very handsome, loyal gentleman, *chère amie* — and — and he does love me, Pauline — loves me so

that life seems holier, brighter, clearer since he has whispered words I never thought to hear, and bade me wait in hopes one day to be his wife. You will say but little of all this, *ma chère*, to your kind parents, and less still to Monsieur Alfred. I know not why, but I half fear he would look grave and cold, and think his sister's friend had grown too forward in her transatlantic home. Yet still he is too good not to feel glad that I am happy, and one day, *bien aimée*, perhaps — for Charley says so — I may come back to France, and thank you once again for all the love and tenderness you showed to the half-orphaned Zoe."

She had finished the letter — the writing of it had cost her some little pains; and the girl sat at her open window watching the fire-flies as they disported themselves in the darkness amidst the blushing oleanders, and the wax-like petals of the white-blossomed camelias. A reverie, half-gladsome and half-sad, retained her there in silence, long after the household had retired to rest; and although she fancied that she still heard from time to time the voices of her parents in a neighbouring room, she never thought of joining them, but sat there still, her elbow resting on the window-sill, and her fair cheek softly fanned by the light breezes of the night.

Meanwhile, and in the room where early in the evening Mrs. Gordon had hailed with delight the rare arrival at that hour of the master of the house, the two whose voices had broken faintly on the stillness of the midnight hour were discoursing of her future,

and one at least was entirely absorbed in projects for her welfare.

"If you knew, my Jaspar," Clarice was saying, "how often, by night as well as by day, through weary months of illness, I have dwelt upon this moment, you would not wonder at my agitation. I have so longed to speak to you of Zoe — so prayed for strength and courage to ask you if to my child you had restored the precious gift which God has given to all — the gift, dear love, of freedom, which your laws have stolen from the people of my race."

"Your race! Pshaw, Clarice, that is nonsense! Your race — why, darling, there can hardly in your veins remain one drop of coloured blood, while, as for Zoe — the child is fair as any Northern girl; and with her golden-tinted hair, and glorious hazel eyes, she'll give some men a heartache, I'll be bound, before she's done with 'em."

He lit a chamber candle as he spoke — a hint for Clarice to retire for the night; but for the first time in her life she overlooked his wish, and rising very slowly from her lounging-chair, laid her thin hands clasped upon his arm.

"Jaspar," she said, imploringly, and looking down upon her he saw that tears were moistening her long lashes; "Jaspar, for nearly eighteen years of love and kindness I thank you, from my heart of hearts. There has been very little I could do to show my gratitude, but," — here her voice failed her slightly, and he murmured as if in deprecation,

"Much — you have done much, Clarice — you have been true and faithful — a good mother — a never-failing friend, an amiable, and an honest-hearted woman."

His words gave her courage, and she proceeded in a firmer voice: —

"Have I been all this, dear Jaspar? You are very good to praise me, and soon, when I am on my bed of death, the memory of those words will smooth my passage to the world of spirits. But I have yet more to say before you leave me — one last request to make — one prayer — a mother's prayer, which if you do not grant, my spirit will not rest in peace; for in my grave I shall be haunted by the thought that Zoe is a *slave*."

She rested her bowed head upon the hands that grasped his arm, and her whole frame shook with quick convulsive sobs. He did his best to soothe her. He bore her to the couch, and spoke to her in anxious tones, using the half-forgotten petting words in which young lovers clothe their tender meaning. He told her not to fear — promised that all was safe, and in vague words assured her that no harm in any case could happen to her child.

It sounded well enough, and the time had been when Clarice, devoted mother though she was, might have been satisfied by his deluding words. But the approach of death is often a strange sharpener of the faculties, and besides the sand in that weak woman's hour-glass was running far too low for moments to be

wasted now; and therefore, she took courage, and at the risk of wearying him, held stoutly to her prayer, urging him by tears, and words that would have melted harder hearts than his, not to let another sun go down before the papers had been signed and sealed, which rescued his daughter Zoe from captivity.

At last he yielded — why she knew not — but a sudden thought appeared to strike him, and in a voice, which had in it a strange sound of exultation, he promised all she asked.

Then, and not till then, did nature sink beneath the effort she had made, but the revulsion was too powerful, and with a long, panting sigh, she sank fainting at his feet.

CHAPTER III.

"I swear to you
I would not harm *her*; I would only love *her*;
I would not take her honour, but restore it."

ON the following morning, long before the hour when it is customary for the indolent creole race to begin the daily routine of their somewhat unvaried existence, Charles Seymour sauntered into the verandah of Mr. Gordon's house.

"De ladies not dar, massa," said Cæsar, with his customary cringing obeisance; "dar be Angy wid de water for Miss Zoe's bath jes' going up," and he pointed as he spoke to the coloured woman who, with her stealthy, cat-like step, passed slowly behind him along the passage.

"Can she take this note for me to her mistress — to Miss Zoe, I mean," said Seymour, placing at the same time a dollar in Cæsar's palm.

"I tink so, sar — you jes' wait a bit — I tank you, sar;" and Cæsar, with the backward scrape of his foot on which he justly prided himself, departed on his mission.

He overtook the waiting-woman at the door of Zoe's room, and, with a knowing wink and a roll of his white eye-balls, presented her with Seymour's letter.

"Dat for Miss Zoe," he whispered; "you gib it her from de 'ansome gin'l'man, Massa Seymour, dat comes sparking her."

Angélique, who had placed the large jug of water on the floor, wiped her hands carefully before she took possession of the delicately-sealed and folded missive. Then she scanned its appearance carefully, and finally ended by depositing it in the pocket of her apron.

"All right," she said, in a low, cautious tone; "you go ahead, Cæsar, and tell the gentleman Miss Zoe will be sure to have it."

Well satisfied with the success of his sable messenger, Seymour, who was, as I hope I have made it appear, a privileged guest, lingered in the drawing-room, hoping, as the minutes were swiftly told off by the French clock upon the chimney-piece, that each succeeding one would herald the entrance of his "ladye love," with her sweet, fresh morning face beaming with the new-born happiness awakened in her heart by his deep love. For very long he waited there, so long that he began to fear — lovers are so apt to dread the worst — not that the slave had failed to do her mission, but that Zoe had grown cold towards him, or fearing to trust herself alone in the interview which he had prayed for, was waiting till her mother could sanction by her presence the half-dreaded *tête-à-tête*.

The time passed on wearily enough, and the disappointed lover was beginning in his wrath to meditate a retreat, when the door opened, and Mrs. Gordon, bearing on her haggard face more than ordinary evidence of illness, entered the room leaning on her daughter's arm.

Zoe's look of surprise when she perceived him was in itself sufficient to convince her lover that by some

means or other his note had never reached its destination. But had it been otherwise, and even though she had of her own accord caused him that grievous disappointment, it would have been impossible for Seymour to retain within his breast one lingering spark of anger while witnessing the quivering lip, and listening to the low, anxious voice betraying the troubled heart of his adored one.

"We are so glad to see you," she said, placing her little hand in his; "mamma was so very ill last night — my own, own mother! Mr. Seymour, help her — see, she will faint again! There, now she will be better" (they had placed her gently on the couch); "she is always better lying down; and, mother, darling, we are near you — Charley and I — you remember — you do hear me — mother, I told you all last night. Ah, Heaven! she does not hear — she cannot understand me! Charley, ring quickly, and send for Dr. Lane."

The sick woman, by a strong effort, as it seemed, raised her hand, and motioned her to silence.

"Too late, my child, too late," she murmured; and then, turning her dim eyes painfully to Seymour, who on the other side of the couch was leaning over her, she said more distinctly, but with evident effort, "May I trust her to you? She says that you are true and loyal; swear to me, then, by all you hold most sacred, that you will not wrong my child."

"Never! so help me God," said Seymour, solemnly. But earnest as were the words, and sacred though the vow, the dying mother was not satisfied.

"Swear to me," she said, and she spoke with an energy terrible to witness in one so near her end; "swear to me that till the priest shall have joined your hands you will not seek her either in her father's house, or in any other place of meeting. Swear to me that you will not strive to be alone with her, and that you will watch with steadfast and religious care, as though she were your sister, over the purity and honour of my child."

While she spoke the words, the crimson blushes spread in quick succession over the pale cheeks, and even to the fair classic forehead of the agitated girl. Fain would she have arrested the exhortation that poured forth with such unexpected force from lips that ceased to tremble while pleading for the one object of her dearest earthly love.

"Mother," she cried, "be silent if you love me. This agitation is wearing you out. Have you no trust in me? none in our Father who is in Heaven? and who has promised that — that we shall not be tempted beyond what we are able to bear?" Her voice sank almost to a whisper, and with the last murmured word she fell upon her knees, and buried her flushed face in her mother's bosom.

"Poor child — poor little girl — my own sweet, loving daughter."

The broken voice came slowly, checked by the shortened breath, and thickly-coming tears. "God knows I do not doubt you — but in your very ignorance your danger lies — for — for alas! as yet you

know not, child, the fatal truth — that — O God! I cannot tell her! Zoe, my darling, do not hate me when I'm gone. Do not say — even to your own heart — for if you do I feel that I shall know it in my grave — Do not say — 'My mother was my bitterest enemy, and I have a right to curse her memory now.'"

To convey even the slightest idea of Zoe's surprise at this outbreak would be impossible. At first she fixed her eyes with a wild look of inquiry on her mother's face, doubting indeed whether she heard aright; and the next, springing to her feet, she motioned Seymour to leave them alone.

"Go," she said, "you cannot help us. I do not understand my mother's meaning, but it would be better — so I think, to leave me now alone — alone with her and God."

Clarice caught the words, low as they were spoken, and taking Seymour's hand as it rested on the arm of the couch, she held it fast.

"When all is over for me in this life," she said very slowly, and with her eyes looking searchingly into his; "when all is over you will tell her everything, and comfort her in this sore trouble. Tell her that my latest breath was spent in praying for my daughter's freedom. Tell her that he, her father, promised that the days when Zoe was a *slave* were passed, and *if* he fails her, if he dares to say that he has broke his word, why then *you'll* come with gold and silver in your hand and buy my girl — my precious girl — my pearl above all price — my beautiful and loving child!"

Till the end her voice was strong, but with the last fond word her strength deserted her, and her head falling forward upon Seymour's arm, she gasped as though for breath.

Zoe, whose emotion had been almost overwhelming during the time when (apparently forgetful of her presence) Mrs. Gordon had thrown her upon her lover's protection, was now at once, by the sight of her mother's evident danger, recalled from all thoughts of self, and she was endeavouring, by administering the usual remedies, to relieve the oppression under which the sufferer laboured, when a footfall, heavier than is deemed allowable in the presence of an invalid, announced the arrival of another witness to the scene.

Mr. Gordon, for it was he, advanced in evident alarm towards the couch —

"Good God!" he hastily exclaimed, "what is all this? your mother worse? Clarice, what is it, love? See, I have brought a present for you. Lift up your head. Heavens! she does not hear me! Have you sent for Dr. Lane? Can you do nothing for her? Oh, my love! my Clarice!" and he threw himself upon the floor beside her in an agony of grief. "Oh, my Clarice! do not leave me thus without a farewell word of love and pardon. I have been often guilty, often cruel, but you have borne with me, my dear one, with an angel's patience, and now, when I have done your bidding — when I hold within my hand the papers that make Zoe free —"

Free! The blessed word had power, even then, to

snatch her for a fleeting moment from the jaws of death. Free! why, she had dreamt of that word somewhere in a far-distant time, and now, it rang around her like the rustling of a seraph's wings, and fanned her with soft airs from heaven.

"Free," she almost shouted, and those around her started at the clear exulting tone. "Free! O Jaspar, God be thanked, and you — ah, let me lay my head upon your breast once more, and hail my coming freedom there, while blessing you that Zoe is no more a slave!"

He held her to his heart, and placed before her eyes, dim with approaching dissolution, the written record she had so wildly yearned for. As she gazed, a smile, beautiful exceedingly, flickered across the dying lips, and rested there.

"Do not grieve for me," she murmured, for I am happier than I deserve — only, when I am gone, Zoe, my child, forgive me, and — and do not leave your father if — if he wants you."

She passed her cold, damp fingers wandringly over his face, for her sight had nearly failed her.

"Pray for me," she murmured, in a faint voice, "and comfort him."

They were her last words. Maternal love was very strong within her, but stronger still, and only to be shaken when the silver chord was broken, and death claimed her as his own, was her love for the man who had bought, deceived, and outraged her; but the memory of whose early adoration (like the scent of roses lingering in a shattered vase) clung to the lovely ruin still.

CHAPTER IV.

"Lost, and yet living in the sun-lit cells
Of memory — that only lightsome place
Where lingers yet the day-spring of my youth:
The years of mourning for thy death are long."

IN the evening of that day, Zoe, after vainly imploring for one more hour before the coffin lid was closed above her mother's death-cold face for ever, laid a few freshly-gathered violets upon the breast now dead alike to joy and sorrow, and all unconscious of the shower of warm tears that fell upon the snow-white shroud.

In the morning Clarice was to be buried — buried without pomp or show in the cemetery appointed for the dead of her poor race of Pariahs, who, even in the grave, where dust shall mingle with its fellow dust, are kept apart and separated from the decaying particles of their whiter brethren.

Throughout the night Zoe had kept a sorrowing vigil beside the remains of the departed one, and when the morning came it found her ready, in her deep mourning garments, to follow the loved corpse to its last dismal resting-place.

The coffin, as is customary in the States, was conveyed to the negro Necropolis in a species of car, painted black, and open at the sides. A deep fringe, or curtain, of the same sombre hue, descended from the roof of the vehicle to the depth of about two feet, leaving the coffin entirely exposed to view.

This hearse, if so it may be called, was followed,

at a foot's pace, by two mourning coaches, the first of which contained Zoe and her father, whilst in the latter were Dr. Lane, the kind friend and physician whose sympathy had been largely bestowed upon the weeping girl in the season of her affection; and Father Pierre, the good old priest, and, in earlier days, the confessor of the poor lost Clarice.

The burial-place was situated at a short distance from the town, among a few ancient ilexes, bare of boughs and leaves, and was enclosed by a wooden fence, half broken down, and falling rapidly into decay. The graveyard was crowded with evidences of the dead who slept below — with rotten crosses, pieces of upright plank, mounds of various size and length, with here and there monuments of more pretension and importance. There were cypress shrubs and flowering plants, too, at rare intervals, with a wreath sometimes of gold-coloured *immortels*, shining as if in mockery on the desolate graves.

But amongst all this, and predominating over all, there was a growth of weeds and briers — dense and rank, through which there trailed venomous reptiles — the moccasin snake, with its black wicked head, and crawling things innumerable.

Zoe stood beside her mother's grave, tearless and silent. There was something stern in the character of her grief; something rebellious in the surging tumult in her breast, as she thought upon her own and her mother's wrongs — the wrongs of centuries, the wrongs of race — the fearful evils brought upon her head by one whom she would fain respect, though love for him

was passed away for ever. She was not moved by pity for him, even when the hard-wrung tears of manhood fell from her father's eyes upon the coffin wherein the unconscious ashes lay. He had been her mother's *owner* and her own *master*, for she knew the truth at last, and that he might have freed her, soul and body, from the yoke, and yet he had kept her head beneath it till the hour when Death, not *he*, set the poor victim free.

Like one in a dream did Zoe listen to the burial service recited over the poor remains by kindly Father Pierre — and then, the ceremony over, she turned away with a firm step and slow towards the carriage. She passed along the irregular rows of humble graves, noticing none till her long black dress caught in the brambles surrounding a small mound, at the head of which was placed a wooden cross.

She stopped for a moment to disengage the crape from the entangling briers, and then for the first time she perceived that she was not alone; for, within a few yards of her, with raised hand and scowling brow stood Angélique, looking like an avenging spirit, invoking curses on the young mourner's head. Absorbed as she was by her great affliction, Zoe could not but notice the strange expression on the waiting-woman's countenance, and guessing that it might in part be occasioned by the unhealed wound dealt her in little Freddy's death, she exerted herself even at that miserable moment to speak words of comfort to the sorrowing mother.

"We are both in grievous affliction, my poor Angy," she said. "This is, I am sure, your lost child's grave.

Let us kneel by it together; and pray that we may meet again where there will be no more partings, and where we shall praise God together in His Heavenly Kingdom."

But, to the girl's surprise, Angy refused, with angry gestures, her invitation, and fixing her eyes on the distant group of which Mr. Gordon was the centre, she said, bitterly —

"The massa go in de grand coach to see the Madam buried. He pray to God by *her* — he hab de priest to say de masses for her soul; but he let little Freddy die widout a word or tear. For after all he was his chile, and as much to him as — but I beg your parding, miss — it's one that oughtenter forget that you're the missus now, and me the maid. I'll keep my place, and nebber tink of Freddy, poor little murdered Freddy, as his own father didn't care for, but let be buried like a nigger or a dog."

She burst into a passion of tears, and when Zoe strove to comfort her, she turned from the young girl angrily. It was a painful sight, that of her untamed, and all ungovernable grief, and Zoe almost gladly left her there, as with a last look in the direction of her mother's grave, she turned to leave the spot.

The bright sun shone upon that dreary Golgotha, and the rank herbage peeped beneath her feet, sending up a faint and sickly odour. Pendent from the trees, like long grey mourning weepers, hung the gloomy tylandsia waving in the fresh spring breeze, as slowly and silently those few sad mourners for the dead departed, leaving "silence undisturbed to watch over the captives' graves."

CHAPTER V.

"And then I clasped my hands and looked around,
But none was near to mark my streaming eyes,
Which poured their warm drops on the sunny ground."

A MONTH had elapsed since Gordon's unhappy mistress, released at last from the weary cares of a life of whose pleasures she had known so few, left the object of her dearest earthly care to the tender mercies of a world in which the weak find few supporters, and where "comfortable men," warmed by their own consciousness of wealth, look coldly out upon the wanderers through life's stormy night.

Zoe had been painfully impressed by the fact, demonstrated so forcibly at her poor mother's funeral, of the scornful separation decreed by law between her own race and her lover's; and almost her first act, after the early agony of her grief had passed away, was to write a letter to the man in whose devotion she alone found comfort, urging him in words, touching in their truthful and dignified simplicity, to break off his engagement with one, a union with whom could not fail to entail upon him mortification and annoyance. To this piteous emanation from a wounded spirit, Seymour returned a prompt and unhesitating reply. He refused, in the most positive and energetic terms, to release her from her promise, vowing a love and constancy *à toute épreuve*, and declaring that nothing short of her own positive rejection (a calamity

which, to own the truth, he did not seem greatly to anticipate) would deter him from putting in execution the projects he had formed for his union with the most worshipped of her sex.

As may readily be imagined, the correspondence between Zoe and her ardent lover did not end here; but, on the contrary, it was carried on with a briskness calculated to lessen, in some measure, the sense of desolation experienced by the lonely girl.

She trusted no one, not even Angy, with her letters; and although that skilful abigail, having recovered from her momentary attack of ill-humour, showed greater zeal than ever in her service, she received no evidence of confidence on the part of her young mistress, who, in truth, shrunk with maiden delicacy from allowing any soul that lived to become a partner in her new-born joys.

Meanwhile, and greatly to the discomfiture of Charley Seymour, the two had never met since the day when Clarice breathed her last, in the pleasant sunny room, endeared by the recollection of many blissful hours. In every letter — and their receipt by Zoe was an affair of almost daily occurrence — Seymour, utterly regardless of the dying woman's prayer, had urged the shortening of his probation, and had entreated permission to visit in her solitude her to whom he had sworn a sacred oath to guard even from himself.

But despite her lover's prayers and threats — for in his selfish passion he did threaten her with abandonment should she refuse to listen to his entreaties —

Zoe, all praise to her, stood firm as a storm-beaten rock in the hard path of duty. She would be his, his only — so she wrote — but not till her first time of mourning for the mother she had lost was over, and not — but this she hardly dared to tell him — till by her father's consent she should leave him in order to depart under safe convoy to the world beyond the seas, where, if he *then* still claimed her as his bride, she would, with joy and gratitude unspeakable, unite her fate with his, to be his loving wife while life should last.

It must not be supposed that during those four slowly-passing weeks the other actors in the drama had either gone to sleep behind the scenes, or had become tired with the "parts" which they had allotted to themselves. It is true that, with some show of respect for Gordon's sudden bereavement, society in the bars and 'change-rooms had been for a while less busy with his name, and John L. Morse had refrained from any dangerous demonstration — from open threats or covert inuendoes. But, reposeful and drowsy as during that short interval of respite seemed the atmosphere around him, the storm-clouds were slowly gathering in the murky sky, and Destiny, the "eyeless charioteer," prepared his steeds to drive the unconscious victims through the tempest.

At first, and whilst the excitement attendant on his grief was fresh, Gordon seemed well content to share his sad young daughter's solitude, and hold melancholy converse with his child on the merits of her whom they had lost. But the avocation of mourning

for the dead has been, since the world began, one of those duties (melancholy pleasures, as by a strange contradiction of terms they are not unfrequently called), which have by common consent fallen to the lot of the gentler sex. It is true that men can and do suffer exceedingly when the heavy stroke first falls which leaves them solitary in their once cheerful homes — at bed and board — within doors and without. Loudly they weep and pray, but the business and the pleasure, it may be, of this work-a-day world has claims, often almost immediate, upon their time and their attention; and women, one of whose appointed offices it doubtless is to speak comfort to those that mourn, are left to weep and supplicate alone.

For many days then — for more indeed than those who knew his nature well would have deemed probable, Gordon remained in strict seclusion, unbroken even by the visits of those whom he classed amongst his friends. Tolerably patient and resigned he seemed at first, but as the days lengthened into weeks he grew less easy to be soothed or pleased — grew irritable, in short, to Zoe's infinite displeasure; for she deemed, in her true-loving heart, those quick imperious tones were an insult to the memory of her whose disembodied spirit seemed to the young heart yearning for communion with the dead, to hover round her still.

The last fortnight of that dreary month was spent by Gordon at his country-house on Orange Creek Plantation. He had not thought it necessary to prepare his daughter by any gentle circumlocution for his

change of plans, nor did he wish her to accompany him, he said. His intention was not to be long absent — a little plantation business to be settled, and then he would return to her.

Zoe — if the truth must be told — did not greatly miss him. She had grown, since the important changes that the past months had wrought, to live much both in the future and the past — forgetful — too forgetful, perhaps, of the present, and of the all-important duties which each day brings with it in its course.

Had she been less absorbed by her own cares, and anticipations for the future, she could have scarcely failed to notice an increased air of discontent brooding over the dark countenance of Angélique. She did not know — as, indeed, how should she? that previous to Mr. Gordon's departure, Angy had spent a weary hour in fruitless entreaties that she might be allowed to accompany him to the plantation. At first she tried some feeble blandishments; having before the interview smoothed down the tight crisped bands of her black hair, and placed upon her well-anointed head its newest, brightest coiffure. She was a handsome woman in her peculiar style, as I have hinted at before, and the expanse of crinoline sat well upon her tall majestic figure; but on this occasion, despite of certain small displays, which did full credit to her coquettish instincts, the harassed man was proof against the mild temptation, and resisting every prayer and will, left Angy to her irksome attendance on the mistress whose ruin she had vowed to work.

CHAPTER VI.

"No foe, no dangerous pass, we heed,
Brook no delay — but onward speed
With loosened rein;
And when the fatal snare is near,
We strive to check our mad career,
But strive in vain."

"WELL, I guess, squire, it's time you and I looked to do a little business again," was Mr. John L. Morse's agreeable suggestion to the embarrassed Southern gentleman, on the occasion of a meeting between the two which took place (unexpectedly to both) one scorching morning, on the shady side of Poydras Street. "Guess, we've been a long spell thinking about this operation, and now we'd best conclude to act."

Mr. Gordon, who had found himself obliged, however unwillingly, to accept the Judas-like palm extended to him, replied with a composure he was far from feeling.

"I regret extremely if the delay — owing to family affliction — which you have been subject to, has been the occasion of any inconvenience; but the fact is that I have been absent from the city — took a run up-river to the plantation. I had a mind to look at some family papers before our affair was concluded, and —"

"Found all right, I hope, squire? Don't doubt

it at all. It comes kinder natural to folks to hanker arter the places they was raised in. Fact that, by Gawd."

"My object in going was, partly at least, to be prepared for this dis— this interview," said Gordon distantly, and without taking any notice of his companion's remark; "and, as you seem also anxious to have it over, it would, perhaps, be advisable to adjourn to some private room — your own, for instance — where there may be some chance of our coming to an understanding."

"Curse this infernal swell-head," muttered Morse, to himself. "Why the h— can't he ask me to hum? I havn't had a chance to see the gal this month."

These pleasant remarks were, of course, unheard by the Southerner, to whom Morse answered aloud, and with as much courtesy as it was in his nature to assume, that he would be happy to see Mr. Gordon in the bed-room, at the St. Louis, which he had chartered for his own use.

"For it's powerful hot, ain't it?" he added. "Gol-darned niggers weather, I reckon, and no mistake!"

The room into which Mr. John Link Morse ushered the man, whom we may safely call his victim, was situated on the third floor, and at the extremity of a long narrow passage. It was a very small apartment, into which the rays of the sun could scarcely penetrate, so thick was the coating of dust that had been

accumulating on the window panes for many a by-gone year.

The view from those windows was far from a lively one, embracing as it did, only the tiled tops of houses, some tall brick chimneys, and occasional glimpses of the intensely blue sky above.

Mr. Morse preceded his visitor into the room, and still retaining his palmetto hat upon his head, invited him to be seated.

"Reckon, I feel like drinking," said the Yankee. "This tarnation weather makes one dry as h—; 'spose we order up a cock-tail, squire. And without waiting for an answer he applied his hand to the bell-rope, and rang it fast and furiously.

"I say you all-fired nigger," was his opening address to the coloured lad, who in breathless haste had obeyed his summons. "I say, you all-fired nigger, bring up two gin slings, and two brandy cock-tails, or I'll —"

But the reader must imagine the succession of imprecations which ran glibly off the speaker's tongue, alternated as they were by explosion of other matters besides words — and to avoid which missiles, Mr. Gordon retreated to a safe, if not a respectful distance.

In due time, but not before the delay necessary for their preparation had called forth a sequel to the former choice series of execrations, the drinks ordered by the excitable gentleman were duly placed on the dirty oilcloth-covered table, and the frightened "boy"

having made his final exit, the long-delayed conference commenced by the following characteristic remark from Gordon's hospitable entertainer: —

"Danged if I know now what you're arter squire. Guess you wouldn't be so all-fired sarcy if you hadn't another cock to fight somewheres. I've been a looking at you and a wondering, and now I feel right down ugly, so I tell you, and won't take no more nonsense."

"You'll take whatever's on the estate I expect," said Gordon, with a cynical smile. "But that's nothing to the purpose. It is your intention to foreclose, and mine (providing you don't change your mind) to leave New Orleans next month with my daughter, in order to join some friends in Germany."

"With your darter, to jine some friends in Germany?" repeated Morse, slowly, and with an air of bewilderment. "You're gwine to Europe, are you — and with your darter? — Well, that's sorter cool, I calculate. It makes me larfe, it does, to hear you."

And true enough the Yankee here broke out into a kind of nervous chuckle, unpleasant to listen to, and equally disagreeable to behold, inasmuch as it disclosed certain discoloured fangs, and other unholy mysteries closely connected with the unclean national habit, in which the worthy individual was at that moment indulging.

Gordon waited till the unattractive burst of merriment had subsided, and then said, quietly,

"I see nothing remarkably entertaining in my observation — only considering, as I said before, that

the vessel sails so shortly, I wish to consult my own and Miss Gordon's convenience by —"

"You go to h—," broke in the Yankee, unable any longer to command his temper. "The gal's mine, and you know it — I bought her with all the rest of your mortgaged property," he continued, almost screaming with rage and excitement. "I bought the gal as safe as if she'd stood upon the block, and been knocked down to me before half Orleans. I've bought the gal, and by h— I'll have her."

He had risen from his chair, and stood there literally foaming at the mouth, and with his blood-shot eyes staring wildly at his adversary. The table was between the two, and John L. Morse never knew how well for him that so it was; for the hot Southern blood had begun to boil in Gordon's veins, and the liquor he had drunk was taking effect upon his brain.

His first impulse had been to take out the sure, ready knife, and wipe out the insult to his child with the life-blood of that cowardly claimant for her beauty. This, I say, was his first impulse; but a moment's reflection was sufficient to stay his hand, and take to that incisive weapon — his bold tongue — for vengeance.

"Gad! man," he said, contemptuously, "have you lost your senses? You don't suppose that I know nothing of my own business, do you? You don't imagine that I am not aware of what's my own, and what — G—d d—n it — may be yours some day! Why, what a fool you take me for! And so you've

seen the list of all this precious property you hanker for, and in it, perhaps, you've found the name of a young —. Hell's curses on you, man," he exclaimed, suddenly interrupting himself; "you thought to have all — did you? You thought to have the finest girl in all the States for nothing — did you? Ha, ha, ha! Well, look again, and then you'll find that to the accursed brute whose shoes you stand in I never mortgaged that young lady. *Her* name is not in the bond, sir. She was away in Europe when that list of property was made; and since I gave my girl her freedom no man alive dares lay a hand upon her, 'and claim her as his own.'"

CHAPTER VII.

"The green lands cradled in the roar
Of western waves, and wildernesses —
Peopled and vast, which skirt the oceans,
Where morning dyes her golden tresses —
Shall soon partake our high emotions."

WHAT is freedom? And who among us, from the highest to the lowest, may with truth aver that he or she can boast that gift of often doubtful good?

"An quisquam est alius liber, nisi ducere vitam
Cui licet, ut voluit?"

And if this be so, and if there be any truth in the old Roman's solution of the great enigma, then may we not be allowed to ask, and still more emphatically than before, who in this world is free?

On the afternoon of the day when two men, heated by passion and the fumes of ardent spirits, dared to make a pure young girl a subject of barter and dispute, the object of their hateful discussions lay in her hammock, beneath the mosquito curtains, pondering on the query with which this chapter is headed. Pondering, too, with such exceeding earnestness that a desire seized her to test the pleasures of such liberty as God had given her.

"Why do I lie here?" she thought, "in solitude and weariness, when the whole world is busy out of doors, and when —"

But instead of following the young girl in her soliloquy, we will relate the simple fact that Zoe, yielding to a kind of uncontrollable impulse, sprang from her swinging couch, and ringing for Angélique, desired that her horses might be ordered.

"For I will ride to-day, Angy," she said; "I will go out into the busy world again and try to chase away the gloom that weighs me down."

The pretty Arab was brought round, the very Sultan stigmatized by Seymour as "too much" for the light hand of his young mistress, and who now pranced before her with his long neck arched, and neighing as though for joy to see her once again.

There was no eager lover now to take her little foot in his broad palm, and place her with exceeding care upon the saddle; and Zoe, as she stood beneath the wide verandah, and felt the dreary void, sighed heavily under the concealing crape of her thick mourning veil.

The month was April now, and the heat almost oppressive to those who had not been accustomed to the semi-tropical climate of the lower valley of the Mississippi. Through a small portion of the sun-scorched streets the girl was forced to take her way ere she could arrive at the place to which she was bound — namely, a grassy ride in the neighbourhood of the Shell Road, from which gay place of resort, equestrians, in search of shade and quiet, were in the habit of diverging.

Notwithstanding the intensity of the afternoon heat,

the streets were, as usual, thronged with passengers, amongst whom the representatives of the negro race (both sexes included) were neither the least numerous nor conspicuous. There, in all shades of colour, were they to be seen, from the coal-black negro, with woolly hair and features of the unmitigated African type, to the Quadroon with her yellow skin, and rippling hair, and the white slave, fair as the fairest importations from Georgia or Circassia.

Impossible to see a people, to all outward appearance at least, more contented with their lot, than those same "wretched slaves," and Zoe, who since her enlightenment on the subject of her own recent escape from a state of bondage, had dwelt long and anxiously on the great question of slavery, looked with newly-awakened feelings of curiosity at the victims of the "peculiar institution."

On they came, apparently far exceeding in numbers the whites who kept them in that state of thralldom. On they came — the young "Orleans" black-dandy — the "city clerk" — (the last word is invariably pronounced according to its orthography) hired out by his owner at high wages, and who had indulged regardless of expense his taste for the magnificent in costume. On he swaggers, swinging his gilt-headed cane, and jingling the showy mass of "charms" in cheap French jewellery that dangles from his guard chain.

But if the sober-minded passer-by is struck with astonishment at the sight of such a large development of dandyism, what must be his surprise and admiration

whilst witnessing the gorgeous personal decorations of the weaker sex? To say that the coloured female population, taken *en masse*, are positively dazzling to the eye, is to give but a faint idea of the effect produced by the love of fashion and of gaudy colours displayed on a fine sunshiny day in the New Orleans streets. Such bonnets, and *sorties de bal*! Such artificial flowers, of all hues and patterns! And then the crinolines, short, and spreading far beyond those adopted by their less-aspiring mistresses. All this cannot fail to impress an inexperienced bystander with the conviction that a portion at least of these sons and daughters of bondage are not destitute of some of the consolations appertaining to the free. Zoe, preoccupied though she was with her own private and especial cares, could scarcely fail to be struck with these peculiarities attendant on a system, the evils of which bore in many ways so hardly on her individual case; for the unrelenting hatred, and undisguised contemptuous loathing, said to be felt by white men to those of her race, was a subject of continual bitterness to a heart proud as it was tender, and independent, even in the midst of its entire self-abnegation to those she loved.

In the North, the period when the nature of the "institution" was almost a mystery to her, she had undergone, as we have seen, in her own person, a rude awakening to the fact that (what may be called) moral cruelties can be practised with impunity by men, on unoffending women; and that the "gentlemen (?) of the *Free States*, who pride themselves on their chivalrous

devotion to the gentler sex, are capable, when their absurd and brutal prejudices are called into action, of deeds of atrocity hardly to be rivalled by the physical barbarities inflicted by the least merciful of the Southern slave-drivers.

With this impression strongly engraven on her mind it was almost a consolation to the lonely girl, when, as she rode slowly onward, her eyes rested momentarily on the showily-attired coloured population, as they walked briskly along the side-walk with cheerful faces and with jaunty steps. They seemed to have not the slightest sense of their own inferiority, nor did they appear at all impressed by the superior privileges enjoyed by their white brethren around them.

She did not know, poor child, that in the very depth of their degradation, and in their apparent conviction that their slavery would last for ever, rested their best security against insult and oppression; and that national and natural antipathy was laid to sleep, when the question of equality appeared one little likely to be ever raised in their behalf.

On the Shell Road at last — with flushed face and burning brow — while Sultan, fresh from his long rest, and fretted by the sound of horses' hoofs behind him, added to her discomfort by straining at her hand in his eagerness for a gallop.

On the Shell Road, at last, with the Arab launched into a canter, and not a glance turned for a single instant to the right hand or the left. On one side ran the dull canal, teeming with hideous alligators, and on

which slow, heavy-laden barges crept along towards the city or the lake; whilst on her left stretched far and wide, but still so dense that only for a few darkened yards could the eye penetrate its gloom — the forest of the “dismal swamp” lying below the level of the artificial road. In it grew the long, straight, graceless cottonwood tree, the standing pool mantled with a green coat of slime rising often far above its roots, while frequently were to be seen the strange stump-like mounds called cypress knees, mixed with an undergrowth of thickly-growing shrubs.

Zoe had not ridden many yards along the crowded road when her attention was arrested by the sudden stopping near her of an advancing horseman, and, looking up, she found herself accosted, with a courteous raising of his hat, by Davenport Seymour.

Her first impulse, after returning his salutation, was to continue on her way, without allowing him the choice of joining her in her ride. She did not feel in the mood for companionship, and her recent loss would be excuse enough, she thought, for her avoidance of him; but, in coming to this resolution, she had reckoned without the knowledge of Davenport's preconceived determination to turn his horse in the direction she was pursuing, and thus enjoy an hour's *tête-à-tête* with his brother's *fiancée*.

“Too hot a day, Miss Gordon,” was his opening observation, “for one so unacclimatized as you are to be abroad. Let us make haste to seek the shelter of the trees; for, if I mistake not, this crowd is anything

but agreeable to you, and I know of a short cut which will lead us directly on the turf, and to where the tallest and most spreading ilexes are growing."

She had placed her little hand, encased in its delicate black gauntlet, into the outstretched palm of Davenport Seymour. He pressed it with a gentle, silent sympathy; and then they rode on side by side together. They passed the race-course — a poor affair enough it would have looked to men accustomed to the well-ordered, smoothly-kept turf of European countries. There were two negro jockeys weighing for a two-mile race between a pair of "cocktails," their drunken owners were standing by, whilst a laughing, jeering set of Louisianian swells were lounging round the gate by which Davenport Seymour and his beautiful companion cantered, on their way to the green shade they longed for.

Perhaps the sporting men, who probably felt as important in their way as the most spirited backer at Tattersall's of the Derby "favourite," indulged in a ribald jest or two at Zoe's expense, as Sultan, with his long, easy thorough-bred step, bore his lovely burthen proudly on. It may be, too, that Davenport, the husband of a few months only, did not escape the witticisms which bachelors, vain of their own freedom, are apt to launch against a new-made Benedict. But if this were the case, the "fun" was lost upon the objects of it, for the two equestrians never looked towards the loafing, *whittling* specimens of the "Orleans" *beau monde*; but dashed on bravely, with the burning sun above them,

and the small shells grinding into impalpable dust beneath their horses' feet. For two-thirds of the whole distance to which the road extended they rode almost in silence, nor was it till they reached a spot marked by a large ilex, adorned with innumerable mossy beards pendent from every bough, that they checked their speed, and Davenport breathed a sigh of relief.

"Thank God," he said, "that I have you safe out of that pandemonium! It was better to ride for it though — was it not? — with such a welcome shade as this before us."

A welcome shade indeed! Light, springing turf beneath their horses' feet; trees, tall and spreading, with festoons of the wild vine, and many a varied creeper swinging from and intertwining each other, even to the very summits of the largest evergreens amongst the goodly groups.

"Delightful, is it not?" said Zoe; "I am so glad you have brought me here. I have often heard of this ride, but have been afraid to venture here alone, or rather with only Sam as my protector."

"Quite right. You could not be too careful; for though, thank Heaven! we Southerners are not disgraced by the unmanly outrages offered in the North to ladies who —"

Seeing that he hesitated, Zoe came to his relief by saying in her quick, ardent way —

"Mr. Seymour, please, I entreat of you, not to spare me. The time was, and that not so very long ago, when I was utterly in the dark as to the disgrace

which in this country, and perhaps in every other," she added with a heavy sigh, "attaches itself to my birth. I believe you are my friend. I know you are the kindest of brothers to him — to Charley; and — I trust — nay, I implore you to believe that, did I think I should entail disgrace upon him, I would — but perhaps he has already told you that I have urged him to forget me, and have promised to do my best not to — not to break my heart."

The ready tears — for, as the reader must be already aware, Zoe was anything but strong-minded — rose to the girl's eyes, and struggled with a faint, beautiful smile, which rose to her lips as she waited for the answer, which was not long in coming.

"He has told me of your generous disinterestedness," Davenport replied. "In that respect Charley has had no secrets from the elder brother, whom he has been accustomed to look upon as a friend."

"But you," asked the impetuous girl, "you and his near relations — his parents, and that darling little girl, his sister — will you all despise me? — all wish that Charley had been dead," she continued bitterly, "before he had taken to his heart the wretched coloured girl who has brought such shame upon their house?"

"You do us all injustice," Davenport answered, with a gentle gravity, which checked Zoe's emotion. "You do us great injustice if you think that the fractional drop of coloured blood which you can claim would prejudice us against one so formed to excite our affection and respect. I cannot, however, say that an entire

trust in your making Charley happy will quite efface the memory of the fact that the day of his marriage with you, must — at least so long as law and custom remain unchanged — see him an exile from home and from our country."

"I had not thought of this," said Zoe, sadly, and after a lengthened pause. "I have been so little in this land, and find it hard to understand such cruel prejudices."

"Cruel indeed! and on what original causes founded it is hard to say. Did it commence when — to a year almost — three centuries ago, one of the greatest of England's monarchs associated herself for piratical purposes with the first slaver, John Hawkins of infamous notoriety, who stole the Africans from their homes to satisfy his lust of gain? A worthy company, was it not? — her Britannic Majesty and the slave-dealer; and between them they made some good operations, if history belies them not."

"But," said Zoe, in a low tone, "England was generous at last, and freed the people from their bondage; while the Pharaohs of his country, often as they are entreated, refuse to let the people go."

"And almost better so," rejoined Davenport, "than to turn them over unprepared for the blessing of freedom, either to the guidance of their own passions, or the tender mercies of the North, who, while heaping insult on their free negroes, and not seldom leaving them to starve, spend their time in preaching in favour of abolition, or in listening to the exaggerated, and

often utterly untrue, reports of the miseries endured in the South by the black and coloured population."

"I suppose it's partly their colour that makes them so detested and despised?" said Zoe, musingly.

"In all likelihood that was originally the main cause of the prevalent feeling, but why this should be the case cannot be satisfactorily explained even by the most zealous advocates of the 'institution.' The mere colour of the skin can be accounted for on scientific principles that entirely nullify the idea that —"

"That *we* are a race between mankind and monkeys," broke in Zoe, emphatically, for Davenport was evidently stumbling over the recollection that his fair auditress was one of those whose condition they were occupied in discussing — "A race created by God to be, to the very end of time, slaves to the white man, inasmuch as we have not souls like theirs, or hearts, or feelings, or perhaps a sense of right and wrong. God help us! But please to tell me what science says about our skins, that I may know the best and worst that can be urged concerning us."

Davenport smiled, although, in truth, he could not help in some degree regretting the turn which the conversation had taken. "An apology is often worse than an affront," he said, "especially when the affront is obviously unintentional. However, as regards the efforts of science to throw light upon this knotty question, I will, at the risk of boring you, sum them up in as few words as possible. In the substance known as human skin, are found three membranes; and that which causes

the difference (as regards colour) between the white man and the black is not, as some suppose, the possession by the latter of a separate and particular membrane, but simply that a colouring substance is found between the two outermost cuticles — a substance which, in its nature, exists in every human being alike, but which differs in quantity according to the degree of heat or cold in which God has placed each separate race."

"I understand — and that in the African race it is superabundant, while among Northern nations there can be but a limited portion of this very objectionable taint."

"Do not call it a taint. We are all liable to its increase, if we sojourn long enough in tropical countries, and I, for one, do not understand how the mere fact of the negro being of a darker hue than the larger portion of the human race should be an argument for slavery. Really, it would, in my opinion, be almost as arbitrary to declare that the red-headed and the blondes in Europe had a right to consider the dark-browed of our species as their inferiors, and, therefore, their natural property."

Zoe laughed.

"Perhaps," she said, "the national prejudice may in some degree be accounted for by the poor negroes' ugliness, for certainly, they are not by any means a race of Venuses and Apollos. But, as you justly say, mere physical ungainliness ought to be no reason for the continuance of this unnatural 'institution,' and —"

"How astonishing is the improvement," broke in Seymour, who had apparently, while following the thread of his own reflections, almost forgotten the presence of his companion. "How astonishing is the improvement of the African race when it is tempered by the slightest admixture of white blood! And this in itself should give the lie to the suggestion that the negroes are a race inferior and apart. The laws of nature would forbid the extension of the hybrids, were the two breeds not essentially the same, and capable of improvement by amalgamation. What beauty of form and feature also do we not see amongst what is called the coloured population! What proofs that if — but I am plunging headlong into the most intricate of subjects, without even giving you the choice of whether or not you are willing to follow me through the labyrinth."

"Pray do not apologize," said Chérie, with one of her sweetest smiles, "for I clearly have been the aggressor. I have so long been anxious to hear truth about this matter; so anxious to learn the extent of good men's prejudices against us, and also on what foundation those prejudices rest, that —"

"Excuse me for interrupting you, but truth is in this matter even more difficult than usual to arrive at, inasmuch as self-interest lies at the bottom of self-deception, and, therefore, of public deception. And how, too, is it possible to reason with men who not only have sugar and cotton lands to cultivate, but

hands wherewith to produce the number of barrels and bales per acre requisite to realize a fortune?"

"I understand," said Chérie; "but will you excuse me if I ask you one more question, and that is — How much am I to believe of the stories circulated by the Abolitionists regarding the fearful cruelties practised in the plantations on the poor helpless blacks? Are they beaten and burned alive? Are they tortured and tormented? And if so, how is it that we see so many cheerful faces round us; and why do so many remain with their owners even when it is in their power to purchase, or otherwise obtain, their freedom?"

"Because," answered Davenport, "there are two sides to every picture; because human nature is composed of different materials; and because each side is interested in making a case for itself. That there are instances of great individual hardship, there can be no doubt; and, equally true is it, that even the extremely mild laws enacted for the protection, and the feeding of the poor blacks, are very little regarded. The overseers on distant plantations also, and especially where the master is an absentee, are very hard upon the negro, for, as their own reputation for efficiency depends on the number of bales of cotton, or barrels of sugar, made during the season, it is their interest to overtask, drive, and often flog the slaves unmercifully. At the same time, the condition of the *stock*, and their fitness for work, is another test of an overseer's merits; and this being the case, is it probable that he would risk his reputation by wantonly destroying lives so

important, or in any way rendering less valuable the property of his employer?"

"And," rejoined Chérie, "a similar argument holds good with regard to the owner himself; at the same time, there must be many instances of cruelties inflicted in sudden passion, for according to the advertisements for runaway negroes and negresses, how maimed and marked the poor creatures often are."

"Too true; nor can we wonder at this, when we reflect that the slaves, from the absence of any exciting motive, such as the ennobling one of hope, are usually provokingly idle, and that the natural impulse of every human being when irritated is, from boyhood upwards, to give vent to his anger and disgust by the infliction of bodily suffering on one weaker than himself. There are laws, as I said before — dead-letter laws, if I may so call them — which visit the white man with death should he take the life of a negro without cause. For torturing, except with the lash, the said helpless individual too, the master is liable to fine, but there is no punishment awarded for any amount of flogging, deserved or otherwise, to which the unhappy victims of caprice and tyranny may have been subjected. The system, my dear Miss Gordon, is a bad, inexpedient, expensive, and disgraceful one. But I believe as regards the aggregate of happiness of our four millions of slaves, it will be found that on comparing their condition with that of the poor in other countries, the advantage will generally lie with our greatly-pitied bondsmen. But, even tak-

ing into consideration how greatly the lot of many is to be envied by the white slaves in Europe, I see no excuse for, or extenuation of, an institution, which degrades alike the owner and his living chattel, and places our country so deplorably low in the scale of civilized nations."

By the time that Davenport had ceased speaking, the shades of night were beginning to close round the still busy city, the environs of which the equestrians were approaching by a different route from that which Zoe had taken when she set forth on her expedition.

But little more conversation passed between them till they stopped their horses at Mr. Gordon's door — Davenport then wished his companion a kind and cordial "good-night," and Chérie, by the light of the rising moon, passed between the rows of tall oleanders into the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Forget the dead, the past? O yes
There are ghosts that may take revenge for it;
Memories that make the heart a tomb,
Regrets which glide through the spirit's gloom,
And with ghastly whispers tell
That joy once lost is pain."

"I AM very sorry, Zoe, you are not pleased; but it can't be helped now, my dear, and you must make the best of it."

He did not know, surely he could not guess the torture that he made her suffer. He was her father. Was not that enough to save her from the wanton pointing at her heart of arrows sharp and poisonous as the deadly weapons hurled from a barbarian's hand?

It was some such hope as this — namely, that he, the being to whom she owed her birth, must perforce have mercy on her, which dulled the keenness of those cruel words, and made poor Zoe more than half believe he said them but to try her.

They had met at breakfast on the morning after Chérie's pleasant ride with the brother of the man she loved. It had been an exercise of mind and body that had done her good, and she had risen from her bed invigorated and refreshed. Gordon had not returned home till long after his daughter had retired to rest, and when he did so, it was with a flushed feverish face, and steps that were not quite so steady, when they trod the narrow path between the pale pink

blossoms as the young girl — his child's had been — some hours before.

She had waited for him an hour or more, before he descended to the morning meal; and when he did he hardly looked at her, but pouring out a full tumbler of iced burgundy, drank it off at once.

Chérie looked at him with surprise, for his hand shook almost convulsively, and his face was wan and haggard.

"You will have a visitor to-day," he said, in a low husky voice, and still without once glancing at his daughter; "a visitor whom I must beg you will be civil to — John Lincoln Morse. We haven't seen him lately, and he complains that we've — we've neglected him."

"Neglected him," repeated Chérie, in surprise. "My dear papa! We never knew him well; hardly at all — indeed — and I never could endure even to speak to him. Why does he come here? But you will be at home of course. You will not leave me alone to — to —"

"My dear Zoe, it is time that this kind of young-lady-like prudery should have an end. You are quite old enough to know that when girls come to your time of life, eighteen or so, marriage comes, too, as a matter of course; and, well — I suppose, you'll go on blushing about it if I wait till to-morrow morning, so I had better speak out at once, and say that I have accepted John Link Morse's proposal for your hand."

Had Gordon suggested to his daughter the advisability of her throwing herself into the canal where the loathsome alligators are ever on the watch for prey; or had he, with an equal amount of fatherly

consideration, proposed that she should exchange (as a domestic pet) her harmless mocking-bird for the companionship of a deadly rattlesnake, Zoe could hardly have been more wonder-stricken than she was by these concluding words.

Even to answer them seemed almost an act of supererogation; for, little as her father was given to jesting, she could not in this instance believe him to be in earnest. There are horrors so great that they pass the bounds even of possibility, and of these Chérie conceived the present to be one.

But still, questionable as was the *plaisanterie*, and repulsive as was Mr. John L. Morse as a subject for conversation, Zoe, feeling that some response was expected of her, forced a smile to her lips, while she said, in a voice a little altered from its accustomed calmness —

“My dear father, forgive me for my stupidity, and pardon me for asking the meaning of your words. Their very sound is strange to me, and it is odious even in a jest to hear the name of such a man as that coupled with mine.”

“Odious enough, I grant you,” said Gordon, whose mouth was full of Périgord pie — “odious enough; and as to its being a joke, I only wish it were one. Why, child, you don’t conclude it’s altogether pleasant to give my daughter to a disgusting Yankee fellow, with no more manners than a hog, and no more feeling — so help me, Gawd, as I believe it — than a gar-fish? But,” he added, suddenly checking his rising passion, “the brute is rich, I tell you — rich

enough to buy us all up; and, as you ought to know by this time, it isn't every white man that's willing to marry a girl with a drop of black blood in her veins."

"Not every one," said Zoe shyly, but still with a certain proud raising of her head, which was not entirely lost upon her father; "not every one — but, dear papa, you may have seen — I ought, though, to have had no secrets from you — Mr. Seymour — Charles Seymour — he does not share these cruel prejudices, and — and — we are engaged to be married."

Gordon, on hearing this, looked up suddenly in his daughter's face, whilst a gleam of what might be almost called hope flashed across his own.

"He will marry you, will he? That sounds well, but I fear it is all nonsense, girl, unless, indeed, he's got a million dollars; for to that tune I'm bound to dance to John L. Morse's fiddling. No, it's all nonsense, girl; and when he comes to-day, as come he will, you'd best be civil to him. We can't afford to quarrel with the scoundrel, though I tell you, girl, that if I only had him half-a-dozen paces off, with a Colt's revolver in my hand, the blackguard's life would not be worth a moment's purchase — not a moment's," he slowly repeated through his set teeth, as with a dark and demoniacal expression on his face, which backed well the assertion he had made, he lounged out of the room.

Not a minute after his departure did Zoe waste in useless meditation, or in self-pity, which could neither console nor assist her. The time for dreams was over for ever, and the moment for action had arrived.

There was but one to whom in this emergency she could apply for aid, and whose heart would, as well she knew, respond at once to her entreaty. Zoe regretted now the time that had been lost, the prayers she had disregarded, and the attempts to be reunited with the man whom in her heart she worshipped, which she had so often and so successfully foiled.

But regrets like these were useless now; and if, as was indeed the case, she had more than once roused her lover into wrath by seeming coldness, the words in which were clothed her urgent entreaty for his presence made ample amends for any former short-comings.

"Forgive me" — she wrote — "forgive me, my own dear love, for what may have looked to you like fear and coldness. I had been so unhappy, so broken-hearted for my mother's loss, and her dear words came back to me by day and night, and made me fear even for your sake to disobey her. But that is over now, my Charley. I mean that there is something dreadful going on, which makes all but this fearful danger seem of little import. I have no time for more, and hardly even do I know if I write sense, so great is my distress. But come to me at once, dear Charley. Let nothing hinder you from this, and do not think me forward and unmaidenly, dear love. You will not when you hear the whole, and learn that you alone can save me."

This note was despatched by a trusty messenger, namely, old Sam the groom; and ere an hour had elapsed it was answered in person by the individual to whom it was addressed.

CHAPTER IX.

"Never! 'Tis certain that no hope is — none?

No hope for me, and yet for thee no fear;

The hardest part of my hard task is done;

Thy words assure me that I am not dear."

HE did not rush to meet her eagerly, but came forward with a courteous gravity that sent a chill to Zoe's heart. She could not know — for as yet the mystery of men's passions (made up of pride and vanity and sensualism) was a sealed book to her — how often her replies to his wild outbreaks of entreaty had mortified and disappointed him. Could she but have seen him (and seeing, looked into his heart) alone, at midnight, with the lamplight gleaming on his forehead, and bending over the paper that was soon to touch the hand of her he idolized, she would have understood his present (seeming) coldness better.

Could she but have known the hours he lay awake counting up the tedious minutes, till the time should come when she would see him, and seeing, make amends for all his previous disappointments — she would have blamed herself, not him — while wondering, woman-like, at the superhuman patience that had made him bear with her in such a Christian spirit!

"You have sent for me at last," he said, "and I am only too happy to be of service to you."

He drew a chair, not very near her, as he spoke, and looked at her pale face furtively.

What a sweet revenge it was! He saw that he

was torturing her, but knew so well that at a word or look of love, his victim would flutter to him like a wounded bird, or a poor faithful dog whose master, in a moment of caprice, has spurned with harshness from his side.

Zoe, poor child, felt sorely frightened and perplexed — astonished, too, and as one aroused most roughly from a dream of love and happiness. Was this the meeting, then, to which, in spite of maidenly reserve, she had looked forward through each hour of the day, and in the wakeful watches of the silent night? Surely it could not be! Why, in her fancy she had been — the foolish, loving child — within his arms ere this — had laid her head upon his bosom, and been soothed there as a petted infant to its rest. The tears came brimming to her eyes as the vain visions swam before her, but she sent back the idle drops to the wounded heart from whence they sprang; and pride coming to her aid, she did her woman's duty bravely.

"I sent for you — yes — I am sorry that I troubled you, but I have no other friend, and —"

She could not go on, for a convulsive sob rose in the fair, round throat, and in her efforts to suppress it she broke down entirely.

He rose at once, and bending over her, took one small, trembling hand in his.

"Zoe," he faltered, "you have deceived me. I had pictured you to myself as strong in mind and nerves — able for your own protection, and wholly independent of my love and care. Tell me this is not so.

Tell me in what I can promote your happiness and — child — child — do not tremble so — I cannot bear to hear you sob. Poor little girl! My own sweet, gentle Zoe."

She was in his arms now, and folded to his breast, panting like a frightened deer whose place of refuge has been gained at last.

"Charley," she gasped, as soon as she could free herself from the caresses which he lavished on her; "Charley, I am so very miserable. You do not — cannot guess the awful misfortunes which are hanging over us. My father — he has told me to-day — not two hours ago, that he has promised — Ah, it is such a shameful thing to say — he has promised that I shall marry the man whom in all the world I should most hate, did he not seem so far beneath all sentiments but those of unspeakable contempt."

"And this man is?" — said Seymour, endeavouring, but with ill-success, to hide his emotion.

"The man my father calls a low-born Yankee, and always seemed till now to look upon as something very bad and vile. Yes, vile, dear Charley, though the word is ugly; for, from all that I can learn, he trades upon some hold he has obtained over my poor father, and—"

"You are to be the sacrifice," interrupted Seymour, passionately. "By heavens! what a cursed plot! I have already heard something of this tale, for men have said within my hearing, that Gordon was used up — had not a leg to stand upon. Cant terms, you understand, for having run in debt and lived beyond one's income. They more than hinted, too, that both

his country properties were mortgaged to the utmost of their value, and that — yes, I see it all, now, this Yankee has bought up the mortgages in order to get you in his power, and force you to be his.”

“Force me!” said Zoe, indignantly. “He will not find that quite so easy as he expects. Force me! Impossible! Why, Charley, it makes me shudder almost with anger against you, to hear you say the word so calmly. To think that such a man should dare, even in a dream, to think of me — should dare to speak my name, the name of one whom you have honoured with your love. Oh, Charley, speak to me — why do you look so strange? Why do you let go my hands, and look as if some evil still more dreadful than I have named were hovering near us?”

“Because — but listen to me, darling, for this is no child's play we have to speak of, but a great stake to risk our all for. The time has come, my Chérie, when you must choose between my love and the foolish prejudices — forgive me for calling them so — which for a whole month past have stood between us and our happiness. The time has come when you must trust me, love, and leaving all for me — friends (thank God they are not many), father, home, and country, must sail with me to happier lands, to lands — if such there be — where freedom is something better than a name, and where, before the altar of your God, I can declare you mine till death shall part us!”

He threw his arms around the pliant form which, with a gentle violence, he had raised up from a sitting

posture; and clasping her to his breast, held her enfolded there. She strove in vain to free herself from his strong grasp, as there with lip to lip, and heart to heart, he whispered, between each passionate caress, his prayer to her to follow him.

"One word — one little word, my angel! For are you not my own — my bride — my own adored one? Say. Promise that this night shall see you in a place of safety — a place which I will tell you of, and tomorrow a ship sails for Hâvre, dearest, and we — God! It is too much happiness — nor can I leave you now, it is too great a trial. Come, my precious love! One word — one little word, only to say that we need part no more."

He held her from him for a moment, gazing into her love-lighted eyes with all the eagerness of passion. He smoothed the hair from her pure forehead with his cold-shaking fingers, for the warm blood of his five-and-twenty summers had rushed wildly back to heart and brain, and wrought in him a momentary madness. He did not *then* — no, not for a single instant, doubt that the sweet lips, fevered by his half-frantic kisses, would refuse to grant him all he asked, and so he waited for a few moments patiently, gloating on her peerless beauty, and gathering up, while life and memory should remain, her image in his breast.

She spoke at last, two words — two only — with quivering lips and lowered eyelids — spoke them very softly, but they were loud enough to turn his heart to stone.

"*I cannot.*"

He almost flung her from him, and (for he felt no pity for her sorrows then) something akin to a deep curse burst from his white lips. The revulsion of feeling was too strong, and at that moment his fierce love took the traitor form of hate.

"You *cannot!* Say the words again! Say why you lured me here — why you gave hopes you never, in your false, cold woman's heart, intended should be realized? Speak, for I will waste my time no longer, grovelling at your feet. I will not be your toy, the object of your ridicule, to be called on and whistled off as if I were a dog to do your bidding."

"Spare me," she murmured, piteously. "Think of my mother's words — my dying, tender mother! You loved her once, and will respect her wishes now; for Charles, it may be that from her rest above she sees us, and prays God to save and comfort me."

"And if she does? Good God, is this a thought to come between two hearts and sever them for ever? For it is for ever," he continued, raising his hand threateningly towards the painfully agitated girl. "For I swear, by the great God who made us both, that if you now refuse to trust me, if you linger here to listen to —"

"Oh, Charley! How cruel! You cannot think —"

"Hush! and hear me speak my vow. If then, I say, you choose to sacrifice my happiness to the memory of the dead, I leave you now for ever, leave you to —"

"Oh, Charley, give me time to think," she said, imploringly. "You would not leave me — oh, no!"

Stay — Swear that you will not leave me to my wretchedness."

"I will not stay to be your laughing-stock. I will not remain within your reach to suffer as I have done this day; but since you ask it," he said, in a somewhat softened tone; "since you ask for time, for love and reason to hold converse, why, take it; but not long will I endure suspense — only till the sun sets this night will I remain in waiting for your answer, and if before the clock strikes nine I have no message from you — why, I will be gone, and — but no — you will not let me turn to other hearts for comfort? You will not fail me at the last, my Zoe? But hark! I hear loud voices in the verandah! Your father's, doubtless, and that man's. One kiss, my Zoe — another — and, O Love! remember that it depends on you alone, whether —"

He had no time for more, for the sound of voices grew more near, and he had barely a moment to escape by the door that led into the vestibule, when Gordon, accompanied by John Link Morse, made his appearance in the room.

The brilliant April sun streamed in through the Venetian blinds, the love-birds twittered gaily on their little perches, and, from the hundred blossoms of the magnolia-trees outside, there rose a perfect gush of fragrance. Spring had come with its fresh buds of promise, and the voice of hope seemed whispering everywhere, save to the young heart heavy with its early sorrows, and cold with a dark presentiment of evil days to come.

CHAPTER X.

"For she was beautiful — her beauty made
The bright world dim, and everything beside
Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade."

JOHN LINK MORSE had not improved in appearance since he had first struck Miss Gordon as being, both in person and manner, the least endurable of the male creation with whom she had ever come in contact. He was attired in a kind of loose frock or paletot, made of some unbleached cotton fabric, and his nether garments, a trifle short for his lengthy limbs, were not remarkable either for perfection of cut, or whiteness of hue. In deference to Miss Gordon, or, perhaps, it was merely a matter of comfort and convenience, John Link pushed back his shabby hat on his entrance, showing thereby a tangled mass of unkempt hair, looking for all the world as if a Natchez tornado had passed through it since last the dirty pocketcomb had done its daily work.

"Powerful warm, ain't it?" he said, at the same time extending a moist ungloved hand to Zoe, who, but that she knew her father's eyes were fixed upon her, would have refused the unwelcome courtesy. "The Almighty hot sun I've felt, I reckon, since I came down-river, and I've got a head-ache a heap along of it."

And the monster, taking from his pocket a coarse handkerchief, of a hue a shade darker than his outer garments, wiped his narrow forehead with it tenderly.

"Very hot," responded Gordon, speaking for his daughter, whose continued silence was beginning to be very embarrassing to him — "anything you would like to take?"

"Well, I don't mind if I do liquor. Some of your high concentrated hard cider — what we city folks call sham-pane — that ain't slow to wind a fellar up, I tell you."

"A bottle of champagne? We'll have it at once. You'll excuse me while I go and make certain that they bring us the right sort." And almost before his hapless daughter was aware of his intention to leave her alone with their distasteful visitor, Mr. Gordon had left the room.

John Link was not naturally a bashful man, but whether the heat had affected his nerves, or that sundry brandy smashes and other complicated drinks had quelled his natural impudence, certain it is, that when he found himself *tête-à-tête* on that bright spring morning with a girl whose every look betrayed the repugnance which she felt towards him, his courage failed him, and for the space of a minute, he would have thankfully hailed the immediate return of the planter from his hospitable errand.

Gladly too — most gladly — would Zoe have left her detested admirer to the enjoyment of his own society, and the "concentrated hard cider," on which he

had evidently fixed so large a portion of his affection; but besides that, she stood in no little fear of the father, who, in *law*, had so lately been her owner too. A few minutes' reflection had convinced her of the expediency of temporizing with the enemy, and by this means becoming, if possible, acquainted with some of the hidden projects against her peace.

She remained therefore where she was, seated on the sofa, which had been her mother's death-bed, and with her hand passed through the collar that encircled the thick burly throat of her faithful dog (Prospero by name, but the which appellation was usually abbreviated into Piero). Rendered more adventurous by her silence, Morse took a few steps in advance, rather unsteadily it must be owned, for he had done the brandy smashes no injustice in accusing them of contributing to his matutinal discomfort.

"Well, that's a new kink, I reckon," he said, "that ar' dog," and emboldened by love and the liquor that he delighted in, John L. Morse seemed about to pat the broad bold forehead of Zoe's faithful guardian.

"You had better not touch him," she said, in her low musical voice; "he is not always kind to strangers, and I might not be able to restrain him if he should turn upon you."

"Guess he won't show his sarse to me," responded Link, brutally. "I calculate he wouldn't like a pill or two in his inside, and I'm never without a six-shooter about me, so I tell you."

His words sounded bravely enough — but still

deeming probably that the better part of valour is discretion — he moved to a few paces' distance, followed by a low growl from Piero, who had displayed from the commencement of the interview two rows of milk-white teeth, formidable to behold.

"Well now, I reckon that ar' beast knows me, and he'll be quiet; but I say, Miss Zoe, if you expect that I'll have that cuss between us two, whenever I come sparking, you're mistaken. This has been a-going on too long, it has, and business is business, as the Kentuckian said when he cut into the pumpkin-pie."

"I do not understand your meaning, sir," said Zoe, speaking with a distant dignity, capable of suppressing any man less cased in vulgar self-importance than the speculator.

"Oh, you don't? Well now, I say, do I look like a coon to swallow that? Do I look like a fellar that hasn't known the tender passion? Why, I'm whittled down with thinking of you to the small end of nothing. Calculate we'll have to go, fust thing, to Saratoga Springs, and take a caution o' sarsaparilla pills besides."

"I suppose I am to conclude from your words," Zoe said, if possible more haughtily than before, "you do me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. I had heard of this before from my father; but, sir, I cannot believe it possible that a gentleman — that you I mean — knowing my sentiments; and that —"

"All right, go a-head; that's allers the way with gals; a blazing-up inside, and Wenham ice outside —

all-fired sarsy, too, they are, the critturs a' drawing of a fellar on, and then clapping on the stopper. But I don't convene with that ar' going on; and so —"

"Pray, sir, say no more. I am sorry if I have not made myself clearly understood. I never intended to deceive you; and am grieved to think that my father should have given you hopes which it is utterly impossible for me to ratify."

She rose as she spoke, and with her graceful head thrown back with a gesture of command, she was sweeping past him — her hand still on the good mastiff's collar — when Link, placing himself before her, barred her passage to the door.

"Well, now," he said, clapping at the same time his palmetto hat upon his head, "if that don't beat creation. It kinder makes me larfe to hear yer;" and catching hold of her skirt, he threw himself on the nearest chair, forcing her rudely towards him.

At this climax to an affront which the passionate Southern girl would at that moment have avenged at the peril of her life, Piero, springing from her relaxing hold, dashed upon her insulter, and placing his strong forepaws upon his shoulders, held him pinioned there.

"Cuss him to hell," roared Morse, in an agony of terror; "call him off, can't you?" and in the extremity of his alarm, he liberated Zoe from the hold which he had laid upon her.

— The girl laughed — a wild hysterical laugh; in

which a sense of the ridiculous was largely mingled with hatred and disgust.

"Hats off! good Piero," she said, and clapping her hands encouragingly, she pointed to the broad palmetto hat slouching over the Yankee's mean grey eyes — "Hats off, good dog, and teach this *gentleman*," she added, in a tone of bitter scorn, "that it is not the custom, at least in civilized countries, to address a lady in her own drawing-room, with a covered head." She had no need to repeat her lesson, for Piero trained to the trick, and eager to distinguish himself, lost not a moment in obeying her command, and seizing the famous palmetto hat in his formidable jaws, wagged his great tail in happy consciousness of victory.

Thoroughly cowed for the moment by this unexpected attack, Morse bore at first in revengeful silence the reproach with which Zoe coupled her appeal to her four-footed guardian. It did not take him long, however, to recover himself, and he was on the point of accosting the retreating girl in terms more energetic than polite, when Cæsar entered the room, bearing in his hand a tray laden with champagne bottles and tumblers.

"I say, you darky," said Link, speaking in a voice still husky from affright — "I say, you darky, clar out now with that ar' dog, and if you'll choke him, I'll give a five-dollar piece. And as for you, gal, darn it, don't you know you've got to buckle to? Your father's near about slung to hell, I reckon. Hasn't got so much as a cusst red cent belonging to him. Them

upper-crust folks as thinks they're made of another sorter clay from the rest o' God's creation, they have to come down sometimes to corn dodgers and sweet potatoes. Yer wouldn't convene now to see the Squire a *mean white** would yer? By Gawd there he is a walking in the garden. Squire," he said, calling to him from the window, "you'll oblige me now if you jest come reound this gal o' yourn. She isn't spry, and that's a fact. Come, now, spose yer tell her slick how matters stand, and that —"

"Leave her to me," said Gordon, on whose face the terrible emotions of the last few hours had done the work of years. "Leave her to me, and I will answer for her obedience to my wishes. Zoe," he continued, addressing his daughter, "retire to your own room, and in an hour's time I shall expect you to listen to me with obedience and respect."

* A term applied to an immense proportion of the population of the Southern States. It comprises all white people who are not possessed of property, and who, being too proud to labour, lead a life of idleness and degradation.

CHAPTER XI.

"Out of the day and night
A joy has taken flight."

"I WRITE to you, my only friend, my only love, in the hope — the almost certain hope — that you will save me. Since you left me I have gone through such dreadful scenes! That man, that odious, wicked man, was left alone with me by my father — think of that, Charley! By my father! I cannot tell you all that passed, but you will believe I was not mild nor patient. Then my father came again, and — and — after the man went away he told me in cruel, dreadful words that I must be Morse's wife, or he would curse me as I knelt and prayed before him. He had no pity, Charley, not a grain; and when I told him I would rather die than yield, he bade me think upon my mother's dying words. For she did say them, Charley. She charged me never to desert my father! I wept and sobbed in my deep, bitter anguish; I said that I would work and toil for him, devoting myself throughout my life to him and him alone; but I might as well have pleaded to a stone; for, indeed, this man has so entrapped him in his toils that, even if he would, I feel he dares not show me mercy. You are my only hope, dear Charley, and if you fail me — but you will not, Dear. I am so poor, and sad, and desolate! In

a week they say I am to be married. Married! Ah! Heavens! and to this coarse, cruel man! But you will save me, Charley — for you are not angry with me now — and this letter will be put into your hands long, long before the hour when you threatened — no, no, you did not threaten your poor Zoe. So I will try to feel quite sure. I will not shed another tear, but pray for you, dear love, and lay me down upon my bed this night to think of you till morning dawns. Angy will take this letter for me. She has promised to give it safely to you. I would have trusted Cæsar, rather, but my father says that he must wait on Mr. Morse and himself at dinner, and lose his Saturday's holiday. God bless you, dear one; how I count the moments till I hear from you. But, for my sake, be cautious. Morse is a treacherous coward, brutal and revengeful. I shall have no peace, love, for a single moment till we both are safe upon the open, glorious sea; and then my father — but I must not think of him. Time presses, and there is Angy standing near, all ready for her walk. God grant she may be swift and faithful; but, I know not why, a strange presentiment of some dreadful evil haunts me, and it needs all my trust in God, and in my own best love to support me through the torments of suspense."

"You will take this letter, Angy, if you please, to the St. Charles, and ask for Mr. Seymour. You need not say you are my servant," she added, in a low tone and with averted face; "it is only to tell him — only

to — Angy, may I, can I trust you? I am so lonely here, so friendless, and —”

“You want dis chile to see your sweet-heart, Missie Zoe,” put in Angélique, using, half in seeming playfulness, more of the negro phraseology than she usually mixed up with her conversation. “Well, *bimeby* I will, for I feel kinder streaked to see yer look so colicky.”

“By-and-by, Angy! That will not do, for you must go at once; and here” — hastily drawing a ring of some value — “take this; I will redeem it with twenty dollars when you bring an answer to my letter.”

“Nebber fear — I’ll bring it. I’ll just fix myself a bit, and then be off like iled lightning to the hotel.”

She took the ring, and long before Zoe could make up her mind whether or not she had acted prudently in confiding her secret to Angélique, the place where the coloured girl had stood was empty, and Zoe was left alone.

“Whar der you be going to, so slick, Miss Angy? Seems like yer’ve got your Sunday-go-to-meetin’ clothes on — all hot and ready, like a buckwheat cake.”

These remarks on Angy’s personal appearance proceeded from old Sam, the coachman, as he met her an hour after walking rapidly along Canal Street, and in a costume differing widely from her usual morning dress. On her head, *fixed* (according as she conjectured)

to the newest fashion, was a head-dress composed of a staring wreath of corn-flowers and poppies, over which she had drawn, for temporary concealment, a gigantic sun-bonnet. Her dress was of blue faded gauze, looped up from the dust, and displaying a course, white-calico petticoat, while over her shoulders she had flung a Paisley shawl of many colours.

"You clar out, ole darkey," was her response to the mild chaffing of her fellow-servant; "I'm gwine on an errant for Missie Zoe, who I 'xpects got what white folks call de tender passion; she's run down to a withered cornstalk, and's nebber ate as much as a sweet potatum all the day."

"Well, but wherebber ar' yer gwine to in all dat ar' tarnation toggery?" persisted Sam, who was not destitute of the feeling of curiosity, and who felt mystified by the amount of splendour exhibited in Mademoiselle Angy's attire.

"Whar am I gwine? What's dat to you? I am gwine where it isn't likely you'll be showing your black face. I'm a gwine to de ball, sar, where de free ladies ar', I am, and you won't get thar no way you can fix it."

At this announcement, delivered as it was with a dignity and importance infinitely amusing, Sam burst into a perfect roar of laughter.

"Yaw! yaw! yaw!" he shouted, advancing in his excitement within a hand's length of the irritated damsel, who, dashing her clenched fingers, clad in soiled white gloves appertaining to her master, into the

coachman's face, sent him reeling, but still laughing loudly, across the street.

"Take dat," she cried, "and don't you t'ink I'm gwine to elerbate myself to a lebel wid a black niggas like you, ole hoss. You make tracks, I tell yer, and don't 'xpect me to hum afore the morning."

When Angélique tripped on towards the scene of gaiety to which she was bound (namely, a third-rate Quadroon ball, in one of the low quarters of the city), the chimes of the old Spanish cathedral in the Place d'Armes were loudly clanging out the hour of nine, and the letter written by the unhappy Zoe in her direst strait was still lying deep in the pocket of her faithless messenger, while she — unmindful of the agony of her who remained at home in all the torment of suspense — counted the moments ere in the whirling waltz or romping polka she should lay her clumsy siege-train against the white man's heart.

CHAPTER XII.

"Yet I fain would die!

To go through life unloving and unloved,
To feel that thirst and hunger of the soul
We cannot still:

I am weary

Of the bewildering masquerade of life."

"You gave the letter, Angy, as I directed."

"Into his own hand, missus — The gen'l'man — Massa Seymour — he war berry pleased, and bed me tank you, and say he would be here some day."

"Some day!" And now almost her very hours could be counted out, while he she trusted so! could it be that he had fulfilled his threat? What if disgusted by her coolness and reserve he had already left the city and was miles away, with anger and contempt within his heart?

O Virtue — rugged nurse — stern teacher of cold lessons harder than unknown tongues to learn! Men say you bring with you your own reward — a reward often long enough indeed in coming; while sinners triumphing in the success of their own devices, only too often have their portion in this world, and go on their way rejoicing.

To Zoe in her solitary chamber the recompense of doing right seemed so extremely doubtful, that the

girl looking at what might have been, had she loved honour less and pleasure more, could see no single gleam of comfort in the narrow thorny path which she had trod.

During the hot, weary hours in the darkened rooms through which she wandered, waiting, watching, still — her lover! and still only he, filled up each anxious thought.

Where could he be? Nay, surely he would come. It was not eight o'clock or near it when she sent her letter; and Angélique — why she had repeated many times and often that *he* had read the letter — that he would come — that — but here a chilling dread possessed her, and for the first time she guessed that Angy might be false.

Once more she questioned the treacherous woman; entreating her with tearful eyes, for maidenly dissimulation was at an end, to tell her all the truth, and by her hopes of future happiness swear that she had told no falsehood.

And Angy swore! With such a solemn, fervent adjuration that her young mistress could not but believe her words, and with a heart brimful of heaviness, returned to keep her now despairing watch.

There is no need to dwell upon the time of misery endured by the two hearts whom fate no less than passion had rent asunder. Seymour, after waiting in a perfect fever of suspense till the French clock upon his chimney-piece had marked an hour past the time appointed, seized the small travelling valise which he

kept prepared for any sudden journey, and leaving the hotel drove to the railway terminus.

A train was at that moment departing, and taking his ticket and his seat, the victim of mingled pride and passion was hurried away from the scene of his lost happiness.

We will not follow him on his journey, but return to the far more to be pitied Zoe, whom the man she so wildly worshipped had deserted in the terrible crisis when the happiness of her whole life hung, as it were, upon a silken thread!

But little chance had that poor feeble girl against the two — one armed with the full weight of parental authority — who held the reins of her most dreadful destiny. She did her best, poor fluttering bird, to escape from their strong toils. She did not yield without full many a struggle that shook her spirit to its centre, and almost made her reason totter on its throne. She would have died a thousand times, sooner than give herself with the youth and beauty loved and prized by Charley, to the low monster whose mere slightest touch was degradation. She would have died, but "'twas not in the bond." It was herself they wanted, herself to pay a debt, a gambling debt in part (she knew that later), and one contracted by the man whose peace of mind and earthly comfort had occupied her mother's latest thoughts.

"O mother," sighed the girl as with uplifted hands she invoked upon her bended knees the tender name, "O mother, if from your home above you note the

tears of your poor broken-hearted child, forgive her if she wavers in her duty. Forgive her if in her wild despair she yearns for love and tenderness. Forgive her if in her desolation she often yearns for him whom *you* thought little worthy; and prays to God and to the Blessed Virgin Mother that she may see his face once more."

Bending low, and with her face buried in the pillow on which her mother breathed her latest sigh, Zoe strove to trace the path of right; strove to reconcile divided duties, and to learn how far her own selfish, fond desires beguiled her from the narrow path of right. The result was (as might be expected from all who are conversant with the weakness of woman's nature), that the unhappy girl, fearful of wrong-doing, goaded by her morbid memories of the death-bed scene, and beyond all the rest, urged on to the sacrifice by alternate threats and prayers from him to whom she owed the highest duty, yielded at last, and promised (God only knows how fearful was the sacrifice) to become the wife of John Link Morse.

CHAPTER XIII.

"But alas! to make me

The fixed figure for the time of scorn,

To point his slow unmoving finger at."

THERE are few things, as all the world knows, more hardening to the heart than long-continued habits of self-indulgence. Nature had not made Jaspar Gordon's inner self of sterner stuff than she had employed in fashioning the hearts of other men. He had begun life full of generous impulses, as they are called, but which in reality often means little more than a love of popularity and a difficulty in saying the important monosyllable "No."

An only son, possessed of an extensive property, which, when he entered upon it, was but slightly embarrassed, he might, indolent slave-owner though he was, have gone through life with an ample sufficiency of enjoyment, had not the love of foreign travel seized him, and with that love the insatiate desire of passing in European cities for a millionaire, and rivalling in profuse expenditure the *dilletantis* and art-treasure-appropriators who throng the capitals of the Old World.

Of course, during the years when Jaspar Gordon was counted amongst the absentees from his native land, *his* portion of that overworked and rapidly-deteriorating soil yielded year by year a smaller return for capital expended. Abuses of all kinds grew and flourished, in proportion as the vegetable product of

the Louisianian sugar plantation became more scanty. His negro "property," from bad management of various kinds, was gradually decreasing in value; and, in short — for what need is there to enter more fully into the early causes of the planter's ruin? — when Mr. Gordon, enriched by a collection of useless articles of *virtu*, returned to his residence on Orange Creek Plantation, his affairs (which he was too indolent to look into) were already in a state of almost irretrievable disorder.

Such a character as I have sketched in Zoe's father was not a likely one to improve under the circumstances in which, to his great disgust, he found himself. Weak, vain, and addicted to every species both of lawless and legitimate pleasure, he indulged without let or hindrance in all expensive tastes and habits; and even when his estates became mortgaged to their fullest value, he shrunk from the stern duty of retrenchment, putting off the evil day of reflection and repentance with the *insouciance* and recklessness peculiar to the children of the South.

Gordon was not, as is the case with some men, born a gambler; but as his better nature grew gradually deteriorated by the many shifts and expedients to which his state of half-concealed bankruptcy reduced him, he turned, as many a desperate man has done before, to the gaming-table as a last resource whereby he hoped to retrieve his desperate fortunes.

He played and lost, lost evening after evening money to the amount of many thousand dollars; while the man whom he most despised and loathed — namely,

the rich boastful Yankee — was the winner of the sums which the unlucky planter found it at the moment utterly out of his power to pay.

Then it was that in the extremity of his distress he bethought him of a means — a dishonourable means, however — to free himself from his embarrassments. He had an uncle, his *dead* mother's brother, living at Philadelphia — a simple-hearted, generous old man, a bachelor and childless. To obtain aid from this relation without the mortification of betraying his own gambling difficulties (for card-playing was one of the vices which the old philanthropist would have found it difficult to forgive), was a plan which presented itself as a means of escape to the embarrassed man.

Mr. Burns was, as I have said, a philanthropist (besides being a man of literary tastes, the which, by the way, had led him to fix his residence in a Northern city), and he had often descanted to his nephew on the duties and responsibilities incurred by the thoughtless owners of valuable human property. That he would gladly seize on the opportunity of purchasing an estate on which he had spent many happy early days, with a sister whom he had dearly loved, seemed very probable to Gordon. Here, too, was an opportunity for the old man to test the efficacy of some of his favourite theories regarding the improvement of the human race, which the charitable Mr. Burns would, his nephew felt almost certain, avail himself of. It is true that the property was heavily mortgaged, so that no person requiring a safe title could by any possibility

become a purchaser. But Mr. Burns was not a business man — and in a transaction with his own nephew, too — pshaw! — he would not stop to investigate, but would become the buyer at once — and Gordon — Well, he should pay his debts of honour, and then with the remaining dollars would depart for Europe with his daughter, leaving the old man to improve the estate for which he would have paid but half its worth — and —

But why need we pursue the hateful task of tracing the devious paths by which this self-deluded man arrived at the conclusion, that in his case to overreach was not to cheat, and that, inasmuch as he was the natural heir to the unsuspecting victim, he had a right to forestall a portion of the money which must one day be his.

But while this process of reasoning was going on in Jaspar Gordon's mind, Morse had, unknown to him, bought up the mortgages on his property, and was, in fact, his creditor for other and far heavier debts than those — so called — of honour. Thoroughly entangled was the planter now in the "smart" Yankee's toils. And even had the latter not possessed a cunning spy — as we are aware was the case — in the enemy's camp, Gordon would have had no more chance of escape than the fly from the spider's web, or the "bird from the snare of the fowler."

It was through Angélique's agency that Morse became possessed of the proof, in the shape of Gordon's own letter to his uncle, of the method for raising the wind meditated by the ruined man. Considerable ingenuity was required in the conducting of this delicate

affair, but both Angélique and her employer had proved themselves equal to the emergency.

It chanced that on the same day Gordon wrote two letters; one being to Morse, entreating a short respite in the payment of the gambling debt, while the other was the important missive which contained proof irrefragable of his own nefarious intentions.

To change the envelopes containing these despatches (which were duly conveyed to Morse by his tool, Angélique) was not a difficult matter; and this done, the only solution of the affair likely to present itself to Gordon was, that in the hurry of the moment he had inadvertently directed the letters to the wrong persons.

Everything proceeded according to the crafty Yankee's intention's; and this being the case, Morse was down upon the miserable man at once. No hope of mercy from one who, besides that he was hardened into the consistency of a nether millstone by a profession (namely, that of debt-collector for Northern money-lenders to Southern spendthrifts), had his own wicked ends to serve, by driving into a corner — a corner in what may be truly called a torture-chamber the selfish and weak-minded profligate.

We have already seen that the latter did not succumb entirely without a struggle to his relentless enemy. The sacrifice of his daughter — though a painful one — was as nothing when compared with the disgrace of being held up to the world as a poor, degraded, and dishonourable man; and when the idea occurred to him that, by setting the beautiful captive

free, he could obtain, through Link's desire to gain possession of her, a hold upon that rapacious individual, he seized upon it with avidity.

But though through this most barbarous and unworthy project he gained a present respite for himself, his conscience did not altogether slumber; and there were moments when he feared that a man so destitute as was Morse of every honourable feeling would fail in the verbal engagements he had entered into, and that even Zoe's marriage would turn out an unreal thing.

No one knew better than Gordon that a marriage between a white man and a coloured woman was not valid in law; but then, not only was Zoe an Octaroon, for which class much indulgence is in the Slave-States both felt and expressed; but Morse had himself avowed that he was willing to take the required oath (an unpleasant one certainly, but justified, as he declared, by the exceeding beauty of the bride) that he, John L. Morse, had coloured blood within his veins.

"And if you're not satisfied, old 'oss," he said, cordially, slapping the sensitive Southerner on the back, "why, we'll be spliced again to York. Do it all full chizel, 'as asy,' as the Irishman said, 'as the cat would be aiting a haporth o' butter.'"

With this promise, although extremely against his will, Mr. Gordon was forced to be content; and lulling as best he could his better feelings to repose, he absented himself as much as lay in his power from his home, where the sight of Zoe's pale, beautiful face spoke volumes of well-merited reproach.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Quin corpus onustum

Hesternis vitiis, animum quoque prægravat unâ,

Atque affigit humo divinæ particulam auræ."

PLEASANT places enough, if we are to judge from the numbers by whom they are everlastingly haunted, are these same "bars and cafés" of New Orleans. Pleasant places enough, as long as the "happy" and endless varieties of liquors therein concocted are the servants, not the masters — the ministers to enjoyment rather than the avenging tyrants paying back the age of pain due for a moment's pleasure.

And then, too, there are dangers attendant on the indulging in this species of festivity, which might well dissuade the wary from entering largely into the spirit of so doubtful a Pandemonium. Goblins damned, as well as spirits of hell, are there in those brilliantly-lighted rooms — goblins mad with lust and rage — with hatred — and desperate beings heated with every evil passion incident to frail humanity. Perhaps, of all the vicious loungers round those haunts of inebriety and crime, the one more wicked than the rest was John *Hell* Morse — a mighty *toper* from his boyhood, but whose head, by nature strong above the average, had of late shown symptoms of yielding beneath the pressure laid upon it. A man cannot with complete impunity begin the day with cocktails, and running

through the changes all the live-long day, of slings, and coblers, eye-openers, and brandy smashes, wind up with Monagahela double-proof, to the accompaniments of bowie knives and shooting-irons. This was, however, the life that for three months past had been led by John Link Morse, Esq., of Boston, Mass., and bridegroom-elect of the loveliest girl that ever trod the soil of Louisiana.

"I'm dubersome he'll kill himself, that chap," was the answering remark of a young New Orleans swell, to whom an admirer of beauty had addressed the above encomium on Zoe Gordon's charms — "I'm dubersome he'll kill himself — see how his hand shakes! Why he can't hold the bottle, nohow he can fix it!"

"He looks uncommon streaky about the gills — sorter colicky, I should say — a nice coon that to go to church to-morrow — I shall be tarnation surprised if he comes up to scratch at all."

The object of these remarks was standing with his back against the bar railings, sometimes talking maudlin nonsense to those around him, and at others glancing rapidly from side to side with an air of terrified suspicion, painful and even revolting to behold. It was an odious fact — that which had been just stated by the bar-room gossip, namely, that on the following day the fearful sacrifice was to be offered up, and Zoe, the pure, high-hearted maiden, in her fresh virgin delicacy, was to become the bride of that rich drunken swaggerer.

In what way the bridegroom-expectant had contrived

to evade the law, which prevents, or rather, which declares to be illegal the marriages between the races, had not as yet been ascertained — and the question had been more than once raised amongst the scandal-mongers, as to whether or not Morse would take any unusual steps to render his union with the beautiful Miss Gordon valid.

“He’ll have some dodge, I’m thinking,” one of his acquaintances suggested. “He’ll prick his hand; we’ve known that done before, and put a drop of some darkey’s blood into the wound.”

“And swear he’s got the coloured liquid — darn it — in his veins,” laughed a rowdy customer, with a coarse palmetto hat, placed well back upon his head, and whose general appearance suggested to any unprejudiced bystander that the wearer was fully capable of carrying out, in his own person, any of the “smart operations” above alluded to.

“Seems he’s got old Gordon hard and fast. Hell Morse warn’t born yesterday, I tell you. He cut his eye teeth right smart, he did.”

“And, in a general way, Gordon’s a born fool. He hadn’t oughter to let that fellar get ahead of him. Lord knows how it was. “Pears that he got hold of another chap as didn’t know about the mor’gage, and was gwine to deal, sell up slick, and tote away to Europe.”

And Hell — he found it out — and this’s what’s come of it. Got hold of that fine gal along of old Gordon’s rascality. Well, he was a fool — the swell-head

democrat — to let the Yankee chaw him up so easy. Tarnation goney, warn't he? But then you see an empty bag can never stand up straight, and Gordon, he never had no ballast in his knowledge-box. Allers a boastin of his forrin friends to Europe — and Monseer Adolf's fricassees."

"He's fricasseed himself, I reckon — cata-whampously chawed up, and ready to make tracks, as I am told, to Texas."

"He'll never do no good. The critter's all bunkum and no brains. But I say, this letting off the steam makes one tarnation dry, and my biler seems like wanting filling up, I kalculate."

Whereupon the two congenial acquaintances adjourned to the bar, and, as I need not add, *liquored* to their hearts' content.

CHAPTER XV.

"Terror without and treachery within ;

The chalice of destruction full.

And where is hope?"

IN civilized countries — or I should rather say in England especially — it is so rare an occurrence for marriages to be contracted between parties, one of which, the weaker and the frailer, is led as a victim to the hymeneal altar, that very few, if any, of my readers are likely to sympathize by reason of their own past experience with the mental miseries of the Octaroon.

That very many enter upon wedded life with feelings of actual personal repugnance, no one will attempt to deny; but then in all such cases it is reasonable to suppose that there are qualifying and alleviating circumstances. The actual marriage-hour is quickly past, and often the young bride sees far beyond the intervening pillar of cloud — *id est*, the husband standing at the altar to receive her plighted vows — a brilliant land of promise. A vision bright of precious jewels worthy of Aladdin's magic garden, gold wherewith to gratify her every wish; and all at the expense of what? A conscience laden with a lie, loss of all self-esteem, and the companionship of one from whose detested presence nothing but death or crime can free her.

Very few were poor Zoe's consolations when the hated image of her betrothed presented itself to her shrinking fancy; but if her worldly counterbalancings

were few, at least there was no self-reproach mingled with her bitter repinings. In all things she could lay her hand upon her heart, and say that to the best of her knowledge and belief she had done her duty. No expectations of earthly pleasure or aggrandizement had led her to choose of her own free-will the man who now so eagerly awaited the moment when he could pounce upon his prey; and when she, with "her maiden cheek as pale as death," and

"Her hands as icy cold,"

would follow him to his home, a loveless victim, dreaming "foul dreams of fearful imagery," and seeing, turn where she would, no loophole for escape.

How very quick the hours and days rolled on! Three only now! How short it seemed — the time that lay between her and her awful destiny! Three! Why, one is spent and gone already, lost in the unfathomable gulf of time, to rise no more for ever!

Two only yet remain — two nights and days, wherein to weep and pray, with none but God to hear her. On the last morning but the one which marked the eve of the fell sacrifice, the girl awoke from a strange, horrid slumber with a cry of pain. Her own sharp cry aroused her, as it echoed through the large, cool, barely-furnished room; and in an instant, casting off in part her troubled slumbers, she lifted up her weary head and stared around her, as if still bewildered by a fearful dream.

She had been carried back in fancy to the *Pensionnat* in the dull old street, into the little bedroom too, hid with its twin beds in a small, snug alcove, where she

and Pauline, after their evening prayers, would lie and prattle to each other still the small hours had struck. A pretty room it was, with a well-*frotté*d floor, and chairs covered with old yellow Utrecht velvet, while upon the walls were prints of sacred subjects—our Saviour's birth and crucifixion, and the blessed Mary nursing, beneath her crown of glory, the Son of Man and his Redeeming God.

In the wondrous world of visionary sight, Zoe had beheld that peaceful room again, but not as she had seen it in the days before the darkening clouds of life had gathered round her, growing so quickly into gloom from the one small, snowy fleck not bigger than a woman's hand, which first gave out its warning from the sky.

The little chamber in the Rue La Grange was no calm maiden's bower, when Zoe, in her dreams, beheld it once again; for on the bed—the little narrow bed, which once was hers, there lay a livid corpse, with glazed, wide-open eyes, most fearful to behold. But though a corpse, the dreadful *thing* seemed sentient, for between its clay-cold rigid arms, it pressed her, and she, looking with bated breath into the ghastly face, saw there the well-loved features of the man, who, in her sorest strait, had left her to endure her agony alone.

With a wild scream, and a strong effort of her will, she seemed to break from his embrace, and then with face as white as the fine cambric screening her panting breast, and with her forehead bathed with dew, she woke to know it was a dream.

A dream—a phantom visitant calling from its "cells of crystal silence" the fierce memory of his pas-

sionate love, and whispering to the poor weak helpless "straw," tossed on the wild crests of the foaming waves, that to be loved by *him*, even were he but the deathlike image of his once living self, and to be clasped to his cold breast covered with the cerements of the grave, was heaven to the thought of resting by the side of him the law would call her husband!

She looked around her dreamily. On her toilet table lay some pretty Paris ornaments, the gifts of loving school-fellows and friends; and close beside her bed there hung the ivory crucifix, her mother's present to her departing child, when Zoe left her parents' side for lands beyond the sea.

Except these few, there were no other objects in the chamber to remind the girl of other, happier scenes; and, therefore, in the confused, first moments of awakening, it seemed to her as though the long years spent in Europe were as unsubstantial facts, and that she had never left the roof beneath whose shelter she was reposing now.

From within the dim musquito curtains, she looked out as through a haze upon the outer world, well-pleased at first to think it all so dreamy and so dull. But soon the vision she had seen came back to her — the vision of her lover, in his shroud, with ice-cold eyes and chilling breath — and then — what was it that sent the crimson blood in torrents to her marble cheek, and made her shrink within herself in bitter shame? God knows, or rather, perhaps we should say the evil one, who is permitted — for what wise purpose we may know some day — to make his temporary dwelling in the purest hearts, and work in them a momentary madness.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Even the instinctive worm on which we tread
Turns, though it wounds not — then with prostrate head
Sinks in the dust, and writhes like me — and dies:
— No: — wears a living death of agonies."

MR. JOHN LINCOLN MORSE having decided to spend the evening of that day (the day haunted throughout to Zoe by the memory of her dream) in the society of his betrothed, had made feeble and nearly abortive efforts to abstain, for a few hours at least, from the imbibing of those spirituous enemies which were gradually stealing away the brains with which nature had endowed him. Wistfully had he gazed upon the pleasant compounds gracing the St. Louis bar, and sore was the struggle in his mind before he could turn away from the glorious opportunity of lowering himself once more beneath the level of the brutes which perish.

His intention while performing this act of self-denial was to enact the lover's part with greater success than had hitherto attended his efforts to render himself agreeable.

"The gal's skittish," he said to himself, "and wants a feller to be all day fiddle-faddling after her, winding her skeins I reckon, like a goney, and telling her she's beautifuller than an angel, till she's so everlasting spry she don't know whether heads or heels is uppermost, and that's a fact."

Link's hands trembled more than was altogether convenient, whilst decking himself for conquest, and drawing on a pair of light checked cotton "pants"

fashioned after the newest Paris pattern, and which he imagined would set off his personal advantages in the eyes of his *fiancée*.

"Cussed if I knows what got with me — can't hold a candle to a catamount. Dang it, everything swims round like a woman in a waltz. 'Spect I can't have drank *one* glass too much to-day, I feel tarnation streaky anyhow."

After coming to which decision, Mr. Morse, adorned in what he jocosely termed his go-to-meetin'-clothes, stepped not over steadily into the bar, and presented himself with what might be emphatically termed an "eye-opener."

After this account of our friend Link's preparations for his wooing, it will readily be believed that on arriving after dinner at Mr. Gordon's house, he was well qualified (in his own opinion at least) to commence the operation of what he euphoniously termed "fiddle-faddling."

His first act after stumbling over Piero (an exhibition of awkwardness which, but for Gordon's intervention, would probably have seriously damaged the famous "pants" above alluded to), was to place himself on a rocking-chair, directly opposite to that occupied by Zoe, and commence swaying himself backward and forward with irritating perseverance.

In vain did the infinitely-disgusted girl retreat farther and farther before his advances; the moment came when the wall effectually checked her retreat, and then Link felt he had her at his mercy.

Her father was occupied with letter-writing in a

distant corner of the room, and Zoe shrinking from her odious visitor's proximity, would have risen, but he laid a restraining hand upon her arm.

"Pears to me you're kinder in a hurry, miss," he said, "and as I've concluded to have a kiss —"

What more he would have said, and to what length he would have carried his audacity, can never now be known, for accident, coming to Zoë's rescue, put an end for the present to Mr. Link Morse's enterprises.

In stretching himself forward to snatch the kiss he had made certain to obtain, the gallant lover overbalanced himself—the chair rocked inconveniently forward, and John Link measured his length upon the floor.

Of course, when he saw his enemy laid low, Piero lost no time in adding his quota to the general confusion, and he had just commenced an attack on the nether person of the luckless lover, when Zoe, with a word, called him from off the prostrate man.

"Dang him," he said, when rather sobered for the moment, he resumed his feet. "That dog is a regular cuss — makes a man feel ugly to have a brute like that set on him."

Seeing that his guest was thoroughly offended, Mr. Gordon exerted himself to restore peace, and so far succeeded, that Link began, after a while, to be quite confidential as regarded the state of his health and feelings.

"Guess," he said, "I'd best take to coffee, not that it's a decent drink for a Christian, whatever it may be for a Turk. A Monongahela smash now is yer only reg'lar anticoliker. If you can't get the genu-ine

article you may put up with a gin cock-tail, but of all things, don't you take the temperance pledge — kills a fellar off faster than yellar fever."

While he spoke (with a thick and glutinous utterance, as though his tongue were stuck with bird-lime to the roof of his mouth), Mr. Gordon, for the first time realized the full extent of his own barbarity, in sacrificing his child to that low-bred drunken reprobate. Gladly would he have retraced his steps, and made any sacrifice (except that of his own comfort and reputation) to save poor Zoe from her fate. But matters had gone too far now to be undone — and besides, was there not the hope — a wicked one, it was true, but still a hope that his intended son-in-law's inveterate habits of intoxication would, ere long, bring about the desirable result of freeing Zoe from her uncongenial mate.

Impressed with this idea, and in fulfilment of his host-like duties, Gordon (after Zoe had, unnoticed, crept away to her own silent chamber) plied his detested visitor with potent and intoxicating drinks, while Morse, yielding to the temptation, drank both long and deep.

Towards the small hours of the morning, a slipshod negro waiter, with bleared eyes and wearied step, opened the door of the St. Louis Hotel to Mr. John L. Morse, who, under the guardianship of two of the city police, had been brought back *non compos mentis* to the address found in the pocket of his paletot.

Verily, Mr. Gordon's pleasant poison was beginning to take good effect.

CHAPTER XVII.

"All holy angels keep me in this hour!
Spirit of her who bore me, look upon me!
Mother of God, the glorified, protect me!"

It was the eve of the poor girl's wedding-day, and the April sun rising as from a fierce stream of light, shed a flood of radiance over the sleeping city. The bright spring month was drawing to a close. In two more days it would be May — May, with its wealth of early leaves and blossoms — May, with its joyous memories of hopeful days gone by — days when the future seems one lengthened summer to the ardent and the young.

When Zoe awoke upon that brilliant morning, a mysterious torpor, an apathy which in itself was rest, seemed to have usurped the place of the fierce agony which before had worked upon each quivering nerve, till she could have almost prayed for the relief of madness or of death.

Angy was standing by her side, the white musquito bars between them, when the pale bride-elect opened her dark eyes upon her last day of freedom. Through the thin gauze she saw in Angélique's hand a letter — a long-shaped missive with a foreign postmark, and the name of Mademoiselle Gordon inscribed upon it in the well-remembered writing of Pauline de Rouvray.

Time was, and very lately too, when Zoe, in her utter inexperience of sensational delights, would have felt her heart dance for joy at sight of that small foreign envelope. But for her the blessed power of receiving happiness from small causes had passed away for ever; so taking the letter coldly from Angélique, she laid it unopened on her pillow.

Throughout the day, the hours wore on in the same dull, weary course. She hardly seemed to heed their passage; but sat there like a statue, feeling with a kind of dreary instinct, that her moral death was near at hand, and that early on the morrow was the time fixed on for her execution.

In vain did Piero, with his honest face turned on her marble countenance, search with the inquiring eyes of canine love for the solution of the painful mystery. In vain did Kit, in wild exuberance of spirits, exert all his humble talents for her amusement. She never listened when he called her "pretty Zoe;" and when his cheery laugh rang out, she could have wept aloud, in memory of the day when her false lover, in that sun-lit room, smiled with her at the merry antics of the well-taught mocking-bird.

But when the evening came — after the long day spent in that dull lethargy of grief — a sensation of restlessness, unyielded to at first, crept over her. It was the last day, she told herself, that she might ever spend so near her mother's grave, and she would visit it, she thought, and pray there once again for strength to bear her heavy sorrows as a Christian might.

The foreign letter lay upon the table near her, with the seal unbroken. She took it up mechanically and placed it in her bosom; for one who loved her, one of the *very* few who could feel pity for her sorrows, had traced those well-known characters, and had sent kindly words across the sea to comfort her.

She placed gay Pauline's letter then upon her breast, and taking in her hand two wreaths (which she had brought from Paris) of the golden-hued *immortelle* flower, she ordered the coachman to drive her slowly to the negro burial-place.

On the way she opened Mademoiselle Rouvray's pretty French epistle, and read it through with a strange and puzzled feeling that the words were not addressed to *her*, but to some young light-hearted girl, whose day of bloom was in its prime, while she, a withered wasted thing, "driven like a homeless cloud from steep to steep," had no part in the bright airy nothings that she read of.

"My pet — my Chérie!" Pauline wrote, "where are you now? and how are you amusing yourself? Have you gone back to the horrid place you call 'Plantation?' for it must be horrid with those dreadful blacks all round — ready — at least, the people here declare so, to rise up and murder every white woman and child directly they find that they can do so with impunity. Now, dearest Zoe, is this really so? and, if it is, ought not you to have guards of soldiers — regiments, I mean — sent out, or else stay always in the city, where, at any rate, you're safe from being

murdered like the poor English ladies by the blacks in India. How I wish that you were here with us, and going to the *spectacle*, though that is almost over now, and so are the balls. But, Chérie, if you could but see some of the new spring dresses! and there will be such an adorable Longchamps! There is a new colour, which is all the rage, called *caméléon qui transpire* — I wish I could describe it — a sort of grey with the very smallest *souçon* of green; but these things, as you know, must be seen to be understood. Alfred lives in a constant state of apprehension, *et pour qui*, do you think? Why, for *cette adorable* Zoe, who is at the mercy of those dreadful blacks, who cannot be human, if all we hear of them is true. He says he longs to go to the States and judge for himself if *la dame de ses pensées* is in danger. There is here much talk of war between your two countries. I do not understand it, but Alfred says, it will be a dreadful one if it begins. How is your *pauvre chère maman*? These things must greatly terrify her. Why will she not come to Europe with her husband and her child, and live away from those people without souls, who hate the whites, and want to kill them? Tell your mother, Chérie, how happy we should be to have her with us. Does she like pretty caps and gowns, and the *spectacle*, and the *Bois*? and would she like to see her pretty Zoe at the Tuileries, and the great balls, and more admired than the Empress or Madame de Castiglione herself? Alfred and my father say, that no one whom they see is half so beautiful as Made-

moiselle de Gordon; but as for *maman*, she has taken a fancy for Naïde — Naïde, who arranges all her fêtes and flowers, and is a sort of *fée* — a *gnome* — an Ariel, with her little spirit-shape, and great black eyes. She has left school entirely, and lives here with us. Mamma cannot get on the least without her, and though papa says, *qu'elle est laide à faire peur*, he laughs at her odd ways, and calls her *un petit démon d'esprit*. I am quite easy about Alfred. He loves none but Zoe. Don't be angry, Chérie, and lift your sweet short upper lip in scorn. He is a very quiet, unobtrusive Alfred, *mais c'est un cœur d'or*, and one, the like of which you might search for through two hemispheres and never find again."

Never again! Ah, poor deserted Chérie! What a sigh she heaved, when, the kind letter finished, she pondered with moist eyes over its contents. Written in utter ignorance of the dark unrest, the blighted hopes, the inmost depths of gloom through which her spirit waded to its misery's climax — there was scarcely a word in Pauline's letter that did not send a deeper, keener pang to her poor wounded heart.

It seemed such mockery now to talk of Alfred's love. Why, if before she left the dear old château, some liking for her had arisen in his heart, had he not shown her something of his love? She was quite heart-whole then — a young, fresh, eager girl — grateful for kindness towards her, and yearning for any means by which to prove her sense of all the generous affection shown her by her friends. If only he had

spoken of his love! But no! — had that been so, she never would have seen the man who had first taught her warm young heart to beat, and Zoe, crushed and miserable though she was, would not have exchanged the memory of those few past rapturous weeks for all the wealth and luxuries, which, as Alfred de Rouvray's wife, she might command.

The carriage meanwhile bore her onward to the cemetery, which, when it reached, she, leaving it with the black coachman at the gate, went with her two wreaths slung upon her arm, with solemn steps towards her mother's grave.

A plain large cross of well-carved wood had been erected there to mark the spot where the loved ashes lay. The mother's name was painted in white letters on the cross's base. Nothing but "Clarice." She had no right to any other, and more distinguishing appellation, and the pious daughter, kneeling there alone, read the short inscription with a chastened and a humble spirit: —

"CLARICE.

"Died February the 28th, 1860.

"Thy rebuke hath broken my heart."

The shadows of the ancient cypresses were lengthening across the grave-mounds, when Zoe, with eyes red with weeping, rose up from her knees, and after casting one fond, last lingering look upon the cross, hung there, with trembling hands, the largest of her funereal garlands.

They were alike in pattern, having the letters I. H. S. in black upon the golden-coloured "*immortelles*." Zoe pressed her lips upon the rustling wreath of never-dying blossoms, inhaling their faint, unearthly perfume, and hallowing the filial offering with her tears. Then she slowly moved away in the direction of another, smaller grave, one, too, which was within view of Sam, from his station at the cemetery-gate.

She did not linger long beside the resting-place of Angy's child. For a few moments only did she bend her knee upon the parched-up sward, and then, having deposited her remaining garland on the narrow, upright board of pine wood, she bent her steps, unobserved by any living soul except the patient Sam, to the carriage she had left.

The coachman descended from his driving-seat to open the carriage-door for his young mistress, and as he did so Zoe noticed that the traces of grief were visible on his cheeks, or, in other words, that Sam had been crying.

"Poor Sam," she said, kindly, and taking his hard, honest hand in hers. "Poor Sam, you will think of me when I am far away from my dear mother's servants and the place where she is lying. And Sam," she added, with a voice choked by sobs, "you will come sometimes and clear away the weeds from off her grave. And if I ever come again —"

But here she broke down, utterly, while Sam (oblivious of the chance that Bessy and Belinda might take advantage of his preoccupation to trot away both

with the carriage and its occupant) fairly sobbed aloud for company.

"Dis chile not forget, Missy Zoe; dis chile make Madam Gordon's grave prime 'ansum. But habn't Missy Zoe no use for ole black Sam? Dis nigg go anywhar for Miss Zoe — go to de North ebem — to Philadelphy? — to New York? O Gorra Mighty, dis chile tink nuffin of gwine to kingdom come for Madam Gordon's darter."

The negroes are very noisy in their demonstrations of sorrow, and so loud was the *hoo-hoo-hooing* of poor, simple-hearted Sam, that Zoe was glad to cut short the expression of his devotion, by bidding him, in kindly accents, drive homewards; promising that, once arrived at the house, she would hold some conversation with him regarding his future prospects in life, when she would be no longer near, to watch over the interests of her father's slaves.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I shall not die, but live forlorn,
How bitter it is to part,
Oh, to meet thee, my love, once more!
Oh, my heart — my heart."

It was very fortunate for Zoe, that on the day preceding his marriage, Mr. John Link Morse was incapacitated from making any attempts at propitiating the favour of his fair betrothed.

The potations of the previous evening had entailed a renewal of the dangerous consolations to be found in the various city bar rooms; and Morse, apparently in a state of incipient idiotism, afforded a lamentable though at the same time a ludicrous spectacle to his associates in riot and dissipation.

To those well versed in the symptoms of that fell disease, it was evident that an attack of delirium tremens was only too likely to supervene on his unremitting orgies — those daily as well as nightly calls upon his constitution indulged in by the expectant bride-groom.

No one felt especially uneasy regarding the fate of that boasting, swaggering Northerner. He had propitiated — during his residence in the city — no single individual in his favour, and when the rowdy, noisy assemblage of young city swells met him on the evening before his wedding-day at a low-class Quadroon

ball held in Bassin Street (at a house called the "Globe"), and witnessed a series of shameless eccentricities on the part of the Yankee speculator — only to be attributed to the vagaries of drunkenness — no feeling save that of ridicule was excited; and the rich man's senseless exhibition was hailed by the laughter-loving Southerners with what may be almost called a feeling of national satisfaction. But stupified although he was by his manifold indulgences, Morse still retained sufficient command over his powers of memory to be aware that Mademoiselle Angélique was to meet him by appointment at that gay place of resort for the wicked and the idle.

The ball was, as indeed was most frequently the case with those assemblages — a masked one, but the *signalement* by which the coloured woman could be recognized had remained indelibly impressed on Morse's brain so eager was he in the pursuit of the object which had so long promised to gratify both his cupidity and his coarse sensual passion.

A scarlet pomegranate flower pinned on the summit of a gleaming orange-coloured head-dress guided the reeling Yankee towards his treacherous ally, and Angy seeing him approach, left her partner in the dance (it was one worthy of "Le Bal Mabille") to give in her report of progress to her employer.

"You took the papers?" he asked, in a thick drunken whisper. "Give 'em to me — right away. Now, then, you yellow toad, what d'ye mean by keep-

ing a white gentleman waiting while you stand sniggering there?"

"It isn't sniggering, sar, no, nor yet larfing. I've got the eye-strikes, I reckon; hab 'em since I took the papers from Miss Zoe's box, and put 'em in de lamp for fear dey find 'em on me."

"Put the papers in the lamp! Gol darn it, you infernal darkey. Why, I wanted 'em? What did you get five dollars for, you black she-devil you! How do I know you burned 'em? How do I know?"

"Why, dar's de bits, sar," said the unabashed woman, producing from her pocket a small black heap of paper ashes wrapped in the corner of a dirty pocket-handkerchief.

"Dar's de bits, and now, don't you be poking of your nose into my face as if you wanted ter smell what I was saying as well as hearing it. Don't you do dat. I say — you keep off, or you'll be toted out of dis here place for being elerbated — dat what you call drunk, you gay white gen'l'mans. Yaw, yaw, yaw."

And Angy's laughter, loud, shrill, and irritating, attracted a crowd of sympathizers with her merriment. Gladly would Morse, driven almost frantic by her impertinence, have inflicted on the bold coloured-woman some signal punishment, but, seeing that public feeling was against him, and being, moreover, oppressed by the physical suffering well known to the drunkard, he obeyed the dictates of prudence, and abandoned the field to his enemy.

While these scenes were being enacted in the "low" quarter of the town — the quarter principally occupied by the French and Spanish creole population — a widely different phase of human passion might have been witnessed in the lofty apartment, with its adjuncts of wealth and refinement, in which Zoe Gordon and her father were spending together their last evening in that luxurious house.

Eight o'clock had struck, and Zoe, who had passed the entire day alone, was growing momentarily more painfully anxious for her father's return.

"Surely," she thought, "he will not let the long night pass, and the dreadful morning come without returning for some last — last words — some kindly words of comfort which may give me courage for the sacrifice."

She walked with a quick, impetuous step, very different from her usual indolent bearing, to and fro along the room, past the wide open French windows, through which in the now gathered gloom — her old familiar friends, the gleaming fire-flies, like tiny spirits from a brighter world, looked in upon her solitude.

"For whose sake is it that I do this thing?" she asked herself. "Surely for his alone, who leaves me here a poor and broken-hearted girl to face the future he has made so terrible."

She paused for a minute, looking out upon the night so calm, and eloquently silent. The steel-blue sky, star-inwrought with golden spangles, spread in measureless height above her head; stupendous as the

never-to-be grasped idea we call Eternity; dread as the shoreless waves of the vast sea which marks the limits of mortality, and as she gazed, the future, hidden in mercy from our finite sight: filled her with dread unspeakable.

The grand majestic sight of Heaven brought to her heart no peace. For between rest and *her* there was a dark, deep slough — a slough in which things all unholy and unclean sprung up and flourished. A dreadful gulf it was, over which a venomous blight burnt up all pure and natural life; leaving instead a vile corruption spreading amongst the smouldering ashes of departed innocence, and wafting all around

“The weary sound and the heavy breath,
And the silent motions of passing Death,
And the smell, cold, oppressive, and dank,
Sent through the pores of the coffin plank.”

If she could but have found peace where alone the desolate on earth should turn for consolation — if she could but have taken to her heart the truth that the sorrows of this life endure but for the twinkling of an eye, and that for those who have fought the good fight bravely here, there is a sure reward in the kingdom which endureth for ever — if she could have realized these mighty facts in that her hour of trial — Zoe, poor, friendless, and worse than orphaned being that she was, might have laid her down to rest in peace, casting all her sorrows upon Him who careth for the poorest of His creatures, and is wont in His mercy to give more than either we desire or deserve.

But at eighteen, when the sap of life rises in all its vigorous strength within the fresh, young, healthy frame — when the lease of existence so lately entered on seems almost to be an endless one — it is hard to lose sight of the hopes of present earthly happiness whilst contemplating the far-removed, uncertain glories of the world to come.

So Zoe, while her eyes were fixed upon the million constellations studding the blue vault of heaven, saw but the things of earth; and as the moments passed, and still the man for whom she was prepared to sell herself at a price so terrible, remained away, an angry bitterness rose up and seethed within her, prompting her to do that which to her gentle heart had never yet seemed possible — namely, to make a stand against her father's will.

Heavens! what a ray of light and hope burst in upon her mind as the idea of resistance became at last a settled purpose! Not for long could she have retained the bold idea; for, impetuous though she was, Zoe did not possess much of the useful quality called moral courage. She was soon crushed down by harshness; and one angry word, especially from her father, would be enough to lay at once the feeble spirit of rebellion in her breast.

But for the moment all seemed changed around her; and, so quick are some young sanguine natures to clutch the buoy of hope flung out upon the angry waves to save the perishing ones, that Zoe's trusting spirit rose again within her, and the possibility of es-

caping from her dreaded fate appeared to grow almost into a certainty.

Her courage fell a little when she heard her father's step upon the gravel; and feeling that her valour might descend, if time were given, to zero, she resolved on taking the initiative at once.

"Father," she said, trying to make her voice sound bold and steady, "Father, I have had a long, long day for pondering on to-morrow, and I think — nay, I have made up my mind that — that — that there may perhaps be yet a chance left for me. You say that Mr. Morse has got a hold upon your property, and that if I do not yield, we shall be poor — so poor that you may be obliged to — well, I know not what it is you dread; but still of this I am certain, that if you sacrifice your child — your poor, poor child, dear father — you could not be *quite* happy; I think that my dear mother's spirit would haunt you in this desolate house — would reproach you with her daughter's misery, and ask you — father, how could you answer? — where you had sent her child?"

She had spoken the words so rapidly that Gordon had not found it easy to silence her, although it was evident, from his disturbed countenance and the angry action of his hand, that he would gladly have broken in upon her torrent of expostulation.

At last she stopped, and he said, suddenly, "We have gone over this unpleasant ground before, and I see no use in treading it again. I have already reminded you of your mother's last injunctions to you —

namely, that you should obey, and never thwart me; so *her* wishes are the last that you should quote in furtherance of your object."

"My mother would not wish to break my heart," said Zoe, passionately.

"Your mother, child, had but one only object — namely, to obtain your freedom. At her dying hour I granted her that boon, and lost — why, what do you think I sank? — how much of capital do you suppose I sacrificed when I presented you those papers which made *you* free, and gave that man the wish to make an honest woman of an Octaroon?"

"I know not, father," said Zoe, excitedly. "I know not either what gave one human being — be he, or be he not a parent — the right to sell, or to set free a fellow-creature — breathing, living, feeling, acting even as he does himself, according to the laws and customs of our common nature. I know not at what sum you may appraise me; but this much I feel, that rather than be made an 'honest woman,' as you term it, by that hated man, I would prefer to be again a slave, and stand upon the block to be bid for as a chattel by my countrymen — by Southern gentlemen, I mean, who would not treat with ignominy a virtuous lady's daughter. For, sir, my mother was a virtuous woman — wife of one man, in deed if not in name — she did her duty by you to the last; and I, her child, deserve at your hands a better fate than —"

"Than to be sold at some ten thousand dollars to the highest bidder! Girl, you are mad to think of

such a fate; besides, this Morse is rich enough to name a price above them all. I tell you, he has wealth unbounded at command, and your best chance is to submit with a good grace to what so many city girls would jump at."

"I would far rather die," she said; and there was such hopeless dejection in her tone, that Gordon felt ashamed to meet her eyes. "I would far rather die — would rather throw myself into the broad canal that runs so deeply yonder, and end at once my misery and my life."

"Tut, tut, girl! you will think better of this," he said, "when you find yourself again in Paris, showing off your marriage finery and jewels to your old friends, who —"

A sudden thought appeared to strike her.

"Father," she cried, springing up suddenly, and laying her clasped hands upon his shoulder. "Father, I have friends there — kind, generous friends — friends who would not see me or my father want. Oh, let us go to them! Surely in that great country, with those noble hearts to aid us, we may find work to do, some employment may be found for you, something, dear father," she added, with a faint, coaxing smile, "to keep the wolf away; and then, at least, dear, we shall be together, and if my love and gratitude, my deep untiring love and heartfelt gratitude can console you for your banishment — Oh, father, they will indeed be yours, and my whole life will be too short to prove that you have not saved your child in vain."

She threw herself upon her knees, and resting her head upon his arm, sobbed there for a few moments unrestrainedly.

Mr. Gordon was touched by her despairing entreaty, but not moved by a hair's breadth from his purpose.

"Poor girl," he said, caressingly, "you know not what you ask; and — and I cannot tell you all. I made a desperate effort, Zoe, some few weeks ago to recover my lost property. The world might say, perhaps, that the attempt was wrong. I did not think so; but — Ah, well — this man, this Yankee, has us in his power, child, and it rests with you alone to save me from disgrace, my daughter, and shield the name your mother bore from shame."

"Enough," said Zoe, moodily, and rising slowly from her knees. "Enough! You need say no more! To-morrow you will find me ready; but now please let me go. I am so sick at heart, and weary — so very, very weary."

She pressed her hand to her heart, and turned so deadly pale, that Gordon, fearing she would faint, hastened to her support; but the girl turned from him passionately, and rejecting his offered assistance, walked with a firm step into the corridor.

She groped along the wall, feeling, now that the necessity for exertion was over, very sick and powerless. Gordon watched her till he saw her bedroom door close behind her, and then, with a bitter sigh, he sank down upon the rocking-chair to indulge in as gloomy a fit of musing as ever stole over the spirit of a guilty man.

CHAPTER XIX.

"When soft winds and sunny skies,
With the green earth harmonize,
And the young and dewy dawn,
Bold as an unhunted fawn,
Up the windless heaven is gone —
Laugh — for, ambushed in the day,
Clouds and whirlwinds watch their prey."

THE first of May was ushered in by a sun that rose as if unwillingly from a thick curtain of mist — a mist that hung heavily over the broad, swiftly-running river, and clung to the forest of masts and steamboat funnels that lay crowded together in front of the Crescent City.

Through the long sleepless night, the poor pale friendless girl lay counting her great wrongs, and breathing passionate prayers (heard perhaps, though answered not), that in this her dire extremity, some way of escape might be vouchsafed to her.

A very torturer appeared to her the man who had bestowed that hated boon — her birth — a man so steeped in subtle villany that even the poor comfort of self-sacrifice for one to whom she owed respect and love, was denied her in her misery.

All night she brooded on the morning's sacrifice which, almost with the coming day, was to be offered up. And yet she strove for patience — tried, poor friendless girl — to see a mightier power dealing the

blow she shrunk from, while she turned in terror from her earthly parent;

“Nor could kiss the hand
Which crushed her to the earth, deeming its stroke
A kind and most paternal chastisement!
And so she knelt through the long sleepless night,
And lifted up to God — the Father of all,
Deep, earnest prayers: and when those were not heard
She bore on patiently.”

But yet, truly selfish and unfeeling as he had shown himself, Mr. Gordon, during the hours of that miserable night, and whilst catching fitful snatches of slumber, disturbed by painful dreams, might claim a fractional share of pity. More than once had thoughts of self-destruction flitted across a brain weakened by habits of intemperance, and by a consciousness of evil-doing. By one act of what he doubtless would have called by the high-sounding name of courage, the daughter of the faithful woman who had been once so dear to him, and whose loss he had sincerely mourned, might have been set free from the cruel bonds coiled round her; while he — but no — it was not *in* the man, whose life had been one unvarying course of self-idolatry to change his nature at the eleventh hour, and offer himself up a voluntary sacrifice on the altar of paternal love.

So he turned round again upon his thorny pillow, courting once more the favours of the capricious god, who, when he is needed most by poor dependent mortals, seems ever least inclined to soothe them with his gentle presence.

It had been arranged by those who had arrogated to themselves the disposal of Zoe's hand and person, that the marriage ceremony should be performed as early as ten o'clock, and in the most private manner possible, at Mr. Gordon's house. For herself, she had remained entirely passive on the occasion, making no single preparation for an event so momentous, and only biding the time when, in her simple morning dress, without an added ornament, or even a bridal veil, placed over the virgin head to hide the deadly pallor of disgust and fear, she would be summoned to the fearful mockery of a religious rite which would consign her to the custody of a man she loathed.

The clock struck eight, and with the sound came Angélique, brisk, smart, and smirking with a marriage morning face, which seemed indeed a mockery of the white despairing one that lay so still upon the lace-trimmed pillow.

She brought a gorgeous bouquet with her for the bride. The bouquet had been gathered by the faithful negro Sam, and if not remarkable for elegant arrangement, they were (even in the midst of her sorrow) accepted by the tender-hearted girl as a proof of affection, dearly prized in her heart's deep desolation.

The flowers lay upon the bed, their perfume recalling with a voluptuous agony the days when the one she had loved and lost, lingered with her amongst nature's floral treasures, binding the scent of every blossom to her memory with a vow of passionate devotion.

"Eight o'clock, miss," said Angy, in her clear unsympathizing voice, "and Massa Morse and de clergyman's to be both here at ten. Berry little time to make Miss Zoe spry for de ceremony; and dar be no gran breakfast ordered, nor nuffin."

The words recalled the unhappy girl to the necessity for exertion, and putting the flowers from her, she slowly commenced her toilette.

For the last time, in that spacious room where she had dreamed her earliest dreams of happy love, she sat before the mirror that gave back her dimmed beauty to the light — for the last time, Angélique combed with agile hand the burnished tresses sweeping the matted floor in their unparalleled luxuriance. And for the last time, kneeling before the holy symbol of her salvation, the forlorn descendant of a doomed and blighted race, repeated her morning orisons to Him who has promised that we shall not be tried beyond what we are able to bear, and that He will of His infinite mercy make a way for escape to those who trust in Him.

Again and again did the earnest prayer rise up to Heaven, for *there* was now her only trust; and the words were still warm upon her lips when Angélique came to announce that all was in readiness for the ceremony.

Yes! He was there! There almost within hearing of her voice! No sudden intervention in favour of that hapless suppliant had stayed his coming. Nothing was there between the torturer and his victim, nothing

to save the beauteous bent down head from the descending stroke.

She stood there white and motionless as an alabaster statue, save that her lip quivered and that the long, dark lashes resting on the clay cold cheek were moistened by the gathering drops she strove to hide. Pure as a sculptured saint she seemed,

“Untainted by the poison clouds which rest on the dark world,”

and yet without a smile to cheer, or heart to bless, she stood as one alone before the altar where her vows were to be spoken.

None save the necessary witnesses were present at the ceremony which transferred Zoe Gordon into the keeping (as her legitimate lord and master) of John Link Morse. That gentleman, as might have been expected from the amount of “restoratives” which he had lately been enjoying, was scarcely in a condition to appreciate as it deserved, the triumph he had succeeded in achieving. Almost mechanically, as it seemed, he performed his part in the melancholy and wicked drama. Presenting the necessary licence to the officiating clergyman, and repeating the responses in a thick, guttural voice, proclaiming as plainly as words could have denounced, the fact of the degraded condition to which indulgence in alcoholic drinks had reduced him.

Not an hour was to be lost, in accordance with Morse's previously-announced intention, before embarking with his pale, patient bride on board that magni-

ficent steamer the "John C. Calhoun," bound up the river to Cincinnati. There was no necessity for delay in the shape of wedding breakfast — adieus to troops of friends, nor even of change from wedding paraphernalia to the sober costume required for the marriage tour.

Scarcely then was the service over, and the blessing given on the ill-assorted pair, when the note of departure sounded, and Zoe, paler if possible than before, and bearing in her hand the bouquet of Cherokee roses and azaleas presented to her by the grieving Sam, passed under the fragrant orange-trees to the carriage which was in readiness to bear her to the water's side.

She leant upon her father's arm, the bridegroom making vigorous, and what, under other circumstances, would have been laughable, efforts to walk with some degree of steadiness in their rear. A row of tearful faces, of various shades of colour, were ranged on either side of the entrance gate; and to each and all of those sorrowing domestics Zoe contrived to say a few words of kindness and farewell.

She was then hurried into the carriage by her father, Morse following closely, while Sam, whose only comfort was the sight of his humble offering in the white hand of his beloved young mistress, drove rapidly away, after passing the back of his ebon hand across his eyes to brush away the tears which had been rapidly gathering at the dismal thought that he would see her lovely face no more.

CHAPTER XX.

"Far, far away, O ye
Halcyons of memory!
Seek some far calmer rest
Than this abandoned breast;
No news of your false spring,
To my heart's winter bring;
Once having gone, in vain
Ye come again."

JASPAR GORDON took leave of his daughter on the Levée. It was a relief to him that she shed no tears — and a satisfaction to his conscience that she showed no disposition either to fainting or hysterics. His son-in-law's condition also, far from filling him with uneasiness, raised still higher the heartfelt expectations he had latterly begun to form — namely, that Fate, as yet so merciless to the miserable Zoe, would cut short the career of Mr. John Link Morse before he had time to break the heart of the victim he had entrapped into his power.

When Zoe, watching its departure from the deck of the "John C. Calhoun," saw the carriage driven slowly away from the crowded Levée, she shed the first tears which had relieved her overburthened breast that day. She did not strive to check them; no, not even when Morse, arm-in-arm with a man of middle age, and an entire stranger to her, stopped in front of where she stood, and both, after taking a close, and as it appeared

to the excited girl an insulting, survey of her person passed on to the bar, in close and earnest conversation.

From that moment, and infinitely to her relief, she saw no more throughout the livelong day of Morse. Taking refuge in her state-room, of which she locked the door with scrupulous care, she listened to the sounds without; trembling lest the man who had a husband's right to approach her, might at any moment thunder at the entrance, and force upon her his unwelcome presence.

Towards the evening, the stewardess rapped at her door, and inquired whether she would not take some refreshment. The woman was Irish by birth, and like many of her calling a gossip by inclination. With the intuitive quickness of her race and sex, she had gleaned the fact that Zoe was a bride — and the girl's own tear-stained face and strict self-seclusion had added the interesting circumstance that she was anything but a happy one.

A good-hearted, cheerful specimen of her country was Biddy O'Callaghan, and when hour after hour stole by, and the newly-married lady, neither showed signs of life, nor symptoms of an inclination to share in the periodical meals, served for the refectation of the passengers, Mrs. O'Callaghan could no longer control her feelings of sympathy and curiosity; therefore, knocking at Zoe's state-room door, she asked her abruptly whether she "wouldn't be for aiting anything the day."

"And wouldn't ye be for taking a mouthful of air

on the horrikin-deck, me dear? Sorra a one is there at all, at all, in it but the ladies. It's smoking and drinking at the bar the gentlemen is, every mother's son of 'em, bad manners to 'em, and one of 'em a married man the day — the crather."

Zoe flinched a little at this home thrust, and at the sharp, knowing look with which it was pointed, but she was wearying of her solitude, and seizing with avidity on the intelligence that the stewardess had volunteered, she hurriedly put on her hat, and declining all Mrs. O'Callaghan's well-meant offers of refreshment, she found her way alone to the hurricane-deck.

As the stewardess had informed her, the ladies, to the amount of nearly a dozen, had collected on that popular promenade in order to enjoy the fresh afternoon breeze that crept over the surface of the water, swaying the tenderer branches of the cotton-wood trees, and bringing a faint roseate tinge into some of the sallow countenances of the Southern ladies.

Not many minutes had elapsed after Zoe, with a flushed, feverish face, had taken up her station on an unoccupied bench situated near the stern of the vessel, when a loud and increasing tumult, proceeding from the lower part of the steamer, aroused her from the inward contemplation of her own anxieties to a sense of what was passing around her.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed one of the affrighted ladies; "what does all that noise mean? Gracious goodness! Why, they're stopping the boat! 'Spose

we've got snagged. Didn't you feel a shock? I've got a life-preserver in my state-room. Shall we all be drowned?"

These, and similar exclamations burst from the small knot of terrified females, when a cry, loud, shrill, and ominous of evil arose from the deck.

Zoe's first impulse was to rise and listen. Her next, to wonder with the rest of the passengers around her, what could have happened to call forth that simultaneous exclamation of horror and dismay.

There was a rush of eager feet — a sound as of many complex orders given and retracted — a surging throng towards the stern, and then a boat as if by magic was lowered to the water's edge.

"A man has fallen overboard — only a deck hand — a drunken Irishman — was the explanation given by the husband of one of the ladies; nor did their informant appear in the slightest degree moved by the "occurrence," as he added — "It's well it ain't one of our gang; could not afford to lose one of our prime hands; not one of 'em worth under a thousand dollars, I calculate."

But whilst the occurrence was being thus coolly discussed by the selfish crowd of lookers-on, a human being was battling for his life in the strong current of the deep, merciless stream.

It is said to be one of the characteristics of the Father of Waters rarely if ever to give up the living prey which has once been drawn into his eager swallow. With an irresistible power of suction it

draws them within its muddy bosom, nor ever relaxes its hold till beneath the strong under-current of the turbid waters, the hapless being sinks to rise no more.

With the love of what is called "sensation" common to our species, Zoe, with several other ladies, remained upon the hurricane-deck with strained eyes fixed upon the boat which had been manned in haste for the rescue of the drowning man. Of course the steamer's progress had, on the first alarm, been suddenly checked, and now she lay almost motionless on the water, the agitation of which was gradually subsiding after the paddle-wheels had ceased their revolutions.

Zoe became greatly excited as she watched the desperate efforts of the rowers to gain the spot where once, and once again, a human form had risen above the surface of the water, disturbing the quiet of its rapid flow, and marking the whereabouts of him they sought to save.

How vigorously they pulled, those brawny sailors (Irish for the most part) who had struggled to be foremost in the race with Death. With a long pull, and a strong, bending to their oars together, silent as became the solemn time, and prayerful it might be (though that was very doubtful), as befitted the near approach of the last, relentless enemy of man.

Every eye on board was fixed upon the muddy current rushing as it seemed in aid of the brave efforts of those sturdy boatmen.

"There he is! I see him! There! There! Only

two boats' length ahead! By Heaven! No! It's a snag! Good God! The man will drown. They'll never reach him! I'll bet two dollars to one they never fish the poor drowned devil out."

"And no great loss, I calculate, if so be they don't," said a voice belonging to a shabby-genteel-looking passenger, who might, for anything his appearance attested to the contrary, have been one of the low professional gamblers who infest the Mississippi steamers. "No great loss, I reckon. It's only that coon-faced fellar, Hell Morse — I thought he'd do the trick. 'Peared to me he wasn't right in his upper story when he cum aboard. Had the horrors, I guess — thought the devil was arter him, when it warn't anything worse than them kidney-headed niggers."

So that struggling man, doing battle for his life in the rushing, rapid current, was no obscure and dollarless deck-passenger — no friendless son of Erin giving up his forlorn existence, unlamented by one surviving relative — one poor, unlettered countryman, who would tell the dismal tale to "*keening* friends" at home. Zoe heard the words so carelessly spoken by the disreputable-looking passenger; and for any sign she gave of interest in the news, she might have been the most entire stranger of all that motley crew to the fast drowning man.

And yet, despite that outwardly calm appearance, the intensity of her horror almost struck her lifeless on the deck. A sound as of many hammers beat upon her ears — her breath came short, and then before

her eyes there spread a film, thick with red spots that looked like blood. Happily no one noticed her. They had been never seen together, that new-made man and wife, and her connection with the wealthy profligate, who since he came on board had scarcely left the precincts of the bar, was hardly known to any in the boat.

She kept her terror, therefore, to herself — her terror and her deep self-loathing; for Zoe, watching as she did the boat (it was an affair of seconds only), knew that in her heart she was a murderess! She wished him dead, that man who, should he live, would have the right to claim her! The right to force her to perform her wife-like duties — the right to make her feel all thoughts of him she loved to be a crime!

Was it in nature to look on and pray that God would spare her enemy? Was it in nature to feel eager hope that once again the waters would divide, and he, the man whom most she loathed on earth, would return as from the jaws of death to persecute and torture her?

With strained eyeballs almost starting from their sockets, but unobserved amidst the general excitement, Zoe never for one instant turned her attention from the spot where last *he* had been seen to rise.

"God! There he is," shouted a tall gentleman near her; whilst another younger man who had mounted on a wooden bench beside the rail, in order to obtain a better view, cried, almost simultaneously,

"I see him! Port your helm — hard a-port. Well

done! My God, they've grappled him!" And then seeing, as most did from the hurricane-deck, that the inanimate form of the rescued man was being, by dint of great exertion, hauled into the boat, a shout of exultation, despite their previous apathy, broke spontaneously from the breasts of the excited spectators of the scene.

Zoe could bear no more. The tension of her nerves was growing too agonizing for endurance, and with an hysterical sob, which she strove in vain to hide, she rushed down the ladder, and to her berth.

There, on her knees, and with her hands pressed convulsively upon her ears, to shut out every revealing sound, she remained quite motionless — dreading, yet longing for intelligence from without, and striving hard to pray against the desperate thoughts and dreadful wishes which would, in spite of all her efforts to suppress them, gain the ascendant over her.

Was he alive or dead? This was the awful question, and one on which the happiness or misery of her life depended. It was terrible to think that such a being should have been snatched away with all his sins upon his head, "unhouseled, unanointed, unannealed," to give an account to Him who made him of the life which he had worse than wasted. It was terrible to let the eyes of imagination picture that swollen, livid corpse, stretched stiff and stark upon the deck, while she — Well, what of her? Could she shed one tear upon the cold remains of him who had been the hated husband of a day? Could she do anything save

thank her God that she was free? — free as the winds of heaven — free to go where she listed — free to write loving words to him who — ah! he *would* come to her — would forget that hideous mockery of a marriage — and she, a virgin wife and widow, would lay her faithful head upon his breast, and forget her every sorrow in the new hopes of happiness which that well-loved voice would whisper.

A blessed calm was stealing over her. Reader, can you forgive this woman, this young, passionate girl, for being human, and seeing only cause for joy and gratitude in the death of that bad man? A blessed calm then stole over a spirit, so long tempest-tossed and weary. She had forgotten for a moment the chance — an almost equal one — that Morse had been rescued by that smart boat's crew in time; and that he might, even at that moment, be gradually reviving under the officious attentions of the charitable, who little knew to what fell purposes he would dedicate his returning powers.

In her haste and agitation she had omitted to fasten the hasp of her state-room door, and as it stood ajar the loud voices of those without came distinctly to her ears.

There was a noise as of many shuffling feet, a brushing against the thin partition which divided her cabin from the gallery out-side, and then a voice, loud and distinct, said —

“You needn't be so careful, men. The gentleman's not made of glass. There — shove ahead with him.

He'll do; and if he doesn't give each of you a hundred dollars for this day's work, why, you look twice before you take him out again so slick — that's all."

The voices ceased, the crowd passed by, and again the light shone in through the window of the small state-room, which had been darkened by the bearers of that dripping burthen.

The crowd swept by, the light glared in; but in the silence there lay prone upon the floor a lifeless form, pale as monumental marble, and well-nigh as cold.

Lie there and rest, poor, desolate girl! Rest, for your task is hard before you, and in this merciless world few hearts will open to the sorrows and sufferings of the Octaroon.

CHAPTER XXI.

“To the deep, to the deep,
Down, down!
Through the shade of sleep;
Through the cloudy strife
Of death and of life;
Through the veil and the bar
Of things which seem and are,
Down, down!”

ZOE was roused from the state of heavy insensibility into which she had fallen by a tremendous noise, which seemed to proceed at once from all parts of the steamer. At first she felt too much stunned to be able to form the remotest idea of the cause to which could be attributed the crushing, shouting, rushing, screaming, and various other sounds which, without a moment's intermission, continued to assail her ears. Gradually, however, the events of the last hour collected themselves in some sort of form within her mind, and the unhappy girl, with bitter self-reproaches for what she continued mentally to call her murderous wishes, resigned herself once more to the conviction that her fate was fixed beyond the possibility of recall.

She could not bring herself to leave the protection — a slender one, indeed — that was afforded by her own state-room. She felt sick and giddy, too, and as if even the act of walking into the ladies' saloon would bring on the return of the deadly faintness by which she had been overpowered.

Still, weak and suffering though she was she found it impossible to remain pent up in her close, stifling cabin, stunned by those loud confusing noises, and labouring under such terrible uncertainty regarding the fate of the rescued man.

The Octaroon rose from her narrow bed, and staggered to the outer door of her state-room. Although night had surprised her during the hours she had spent in it, there was light enough to distinguish through the uncurtained window even the smallest objects it contained; for a full pale-faced moon was gazing down upon the earth with her cold, joyless eye, tinging with a faint, unearthly blue, one long straight line of cottonwood trees, and throwing into inky shadow the "giant grove" which made an "alley" of the noble stream.

It required but a glance to prove to one whose life had been partly spent in the neighbourhood of the Mississippi, that a race between two rival steamers was in progress — a race at the very moment when a fellow-being was most probably lying between life and death; for faint and stunned though she had been, a sense of the progress of time had not been wholly absent from Zoe, and she could realize how short a period she had spent in insensibility. She stole softly to the balustrade or balcony guard, and looked about her with a mixture of wonder and alarm, which was well justified by the scene before her.

Within a distance of some fifty yards, a towering steamboat of the same build, and apparently of about the same dimensions, as the "John C. Calhoun," was

running a mad race with that majestic vessel by the light of the broad May moon. A temporary madness seemed to have taken possession of every individual — man, woman, and child — on board the boat which so lately had been lying still and silent as a painted vessel in the quickly-coming twilight.

Before she had well got head-way again, after receiving on board the exhausted boat's crew, with the apparently lifeless body they had recovered from the water, the noise of approaching paddle-wheels was heard in the distance; and soon — for the speed of the advancing boat appeared to be prodigious — a large vessel, which proved to be a new one called the "Magnolia," shot ahead of the "John C. Calhoun."

Now the captain of that celebrated boat was not a man to take such an affront coolly, especially as there had been a considerable amount of chaff and banter between the two commanders previous to the launching of the "Magnolia." He was a smart man was Captain Grigg, fond of his liquor too, and a little given to strong language. But the men liked him as a boon companion, and, moreover, he took care to let his bar out to a "gentleman" who thoroughly understood his business, and gave them with a pleasant jest their money's worth of alcohol.

With the ladies, too, Captain Grigg was a prime favourite, for he was a bachelor with a "sparking" kind of way with him; and besides, he let them do pretty much as they liked on board, never interfering

with their amusements, and losing his quarter dollars to them at "brag" or "poker" like a man.

In any other country of the civilized world, it would be but natural to suppose that the gentler passengers on board the "John C. Calhoun" would have been too much agitated by the late nearly tragical occurrence to admit of their craving at that particular juncture for any fresh excitement. Not so, however, do the Transatlantic ladies yield to the amiable weaknesses incidental to their sex; and when the fair creatures in crinoline and muslin heard the challenge to the fight, they ranged themselves with one accord in order of battle, urging their gallant captain to stand firm, and hold his own against the bold "Magnolia," and her new high-pressure engines.

Nothing loth was Captain Grigg to accept the challenge offered by the rival commander through his speaking trumpet from the hurricane-deck of the boastful steamer. The order loudly given to heap on fuel was gleefully obeyed, and soon the "John C. Calhoun" was almost doubling her former rate of speed. The male passengers, with brains heated by incessant visits to the bar, became excited to a pitch of apparent insanity by the noise, and the speed with which the steamer tore her way up-stream in her mad race against the rival boat. On they went, side by side, scarcely a yard to show in favour of either; while bets ran high, and awful language was hurled from the lips of captain, crew, and passengers against the adventurous

craft which dared to measure speed against the far-famed, and hitherto unconquered, Mississippi monarch.

When Zoe left her cabin, the excitement was at its height. The water between the racing vessels was foaming wildly as if with rage at this disturbance of its tranquil flow towards the ocean; while the tall funnels of each rushing vessel (blanched to a white hue by the heat of their fires) seemed bending to the race with life-like energy.

To describe the shouts, the screams, the oaths of men, and the wild eyes and gestures of the women, would be impossible; and over all these shone, pale, calm, disdainful, the cold face of the grand "lesser-light" set there to rule the night, but not the ungod-like spirits let loose to cloud its glory. A few yards gained at last! Gained by the noble "John C. Calhoun," but at the expense of what? Of every stick of fuel remaining in the wood shed, when the vain strife commenced! Then poured the curses forth in earnest, and foul words unmeet to sound in women's ears, thundered along the crowded decks.

"Sling you to hell!" the captain shouted, "bring out the chairs and tables! Burn up the niggers — cuss 'em — there'll be fat and grease enough then to light a wick, if it was stuck in it."

By the time he had finished this original remark, a dozen hands at least had brought out from the saloon, and helped to fling into the fire, the first articles of furniture on which they could lay their hands. Then suddenly sprung up the fervent blaze once more, and

soon the gallant vessel recovered her lost ground, and even seemed to gain upon her adversary.

"That's right, go ahead! On with 'em," screamed the captain; for what was the loss of well-carved rose and satin wood, and what were upholsterers' bills when honour was at stake, and glory to be gained or lost?

On they sped, the water surging from the paddle-wheels, and every timber in the strongbuilt boat seeming to groan beneath the pressure put upon it. On they sped beneath that clear and ghost-like shimmer; and so light and daylike was it, that those on board (the steamer having usurped the "Magnolia's" station nearest the river's bank) could (strange as it may seem) see the brilliantly-scarlet Virginia nightingales hopping on the branches near the stream.

A quiet-looking, middle-aged man standing near the terrified Zoe pointed out the birds to her.

"As clear as morning about, ain't it, now?" he said. "Seems all creation's riz, thinking it's daylight. Guess, though, we can't get along much farrer this way. She's an old boat is 'John C. Calhoun;' and if her bilers don't bust right away, I'll —"

But at that moment the excitement became so intense that words were arrested on every lip, for they were within a dozen yards of the "Magnolia," and abreast of her, the water dashed from each separate paddle almost mingling in the space between them.

At that moment, Zoe — it could not be a vision, for she saw each well-remembered feature as distinctly

as though the sun's rays fell upon them — recognized the tall form and pale aristocratic features of Charley Seymour.

With a piercing scream — a scream heard above the plashing of the rushing waters — she flung her arms towards him; but could she hope, in that dense crowd of faces, that he would recognize the one he loved; and if he did — what then? Was there not guilt even in the desperate rapture welling through her heart, and —

But almost before she had had time to speak the inward question, the steamer on the deck of which she stood had shot ahead; and while Zoe's eyes were still strained to obtain another glimpse of Seymour's face, the "Magnolia," suddenly, and to the unmitigated surprise of everyone on board the "John C. Calhoun," suddenly stopped; the shouts from her thronged decks were arrested as if by magic, and the smoke which had a moment before issued in volumes from her overheated funnels cleared away into the soft night air, leaving the boastful vessel lying like a log upon the water.

"Guess she ain't got no more wood aboard."

"Spect she ain't mor'n a cord to take her on to next landing."

"Calkalate they're a grain streaked aboard to-night."

These and suchlike sarcastic remarks on the sudden giving-in of the rival boat were accompanied and drowned indeed by yells of triumph, with sounds

scarcely human, intended to represent the crowing of cocks and other pæans, wherewith to celebrate the victory gained by the "John C. Calhoun."

Zoe lingered on the gallery long after all was quiet — all save the distant sounds of revelry from the bar and gambling place — and, nearer still to where she stood, a horrid cry, rising at intervals upon her ear — the cry it seemed to her of one possessed, and given over — God be merciful to him! — to that dread thing, a reprobate and wandering mind!

Alone, and unobserved in her sad watch, the young girl deemed herself. But, alas! it was not so; for wicked eyes were fixed upon her — eyes in which greed of gain were united to a snake-like cunning — the eyes they were of him, who, when she stood at early noon-time on the deck, had seemed (with Morse to help him in the calculation) busied in counting up each separate charm which nature had with lavish hand bestowed upon the daughter of a slave.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Yet I fain would die!

To go through life, unloving and unloved;

To feel that thirst and hunger of the soul

We cannot still; that longing, that wild impulse."

"All this the dead feel not — the dead alone —

Would I were with them!"

"If she positively is the man's wife, she ought to go to him. Really, this continual noise is dreadful. All last night I was so nervous, I could scarcely close my eyes."

"And, they do say, she was only married to him yesterday morning. How unaccountable strange these Southerners are! I should admire now to see her to York, letting her husband go on that way—asking for her and holloring—while she keeps in her own state-room, reading, I dare say, or sewing—or looking at her finery."

"She doesn't seem to think much about her dress," said the first speaker, a Philadelphian lady, extensively got up in a "moiré" silk gown, that stood on end with "richness," a Brussels lace collar, and bracelets of questionable taste, purchased from the most fashionable jeweller in the Palais-Royal. "She doesn't seem to think much of what she puts on. That alpaca dress she wore to-day didn't cost more than five dollars at any store at New Orleans; and then, her bonnet! I conclude I could get a better one at L—'s for four."

"She's keeping back her *trousseau*, I expect, to make a show when she gets North," said the younger lady, who, with her companion and sister-in-law (the

gorgeous lady in the *moiré* silk), were on their way from Texas to the Quaker city. "It seems curious now, doesn't it, that so many of the ladies in the saloon should know this Mr. John Link Morse—at least, by name—and yet shouldn't have heard anything about the wedding.

"S'pose they elected to get married private," laughed the elder lady, whose name was Morgan. "Well, wouldn't I be wrathful now, if anyone proposed that dodge to me? One isn't married for certain twice, I calculate, and I should feel right bad not to show my 'geounds' to all my friends, and have a wedding worth the looking at."

The ladies were promenading the hurricane-deck while this colloquy was going on; and as Miss Clorinda Morgan was a showy-looking damsel, with a disposition well pronounced for fun and flirtation, the two ladies were soon joined by several idle loungers of the other sex.

It was as nearly as possible four-and-twenty hours since John L. Morse, haunted by imaginary enemies, and possessed by the brandy-bestowed idea that he was encompassed about by men ravenous for his blood, threw himself from the lower deck into the river, in the hope of escaping from the still more relentless jaws of his imaginary foes.

After the rescue, the doctor—for there fortunately chanced to be one on board—spared no pains in restoring to life and consciousness the livid, swollen body of the drunkard. At last, and after an hour's incessant labour, he succeeded in his painful task, and Link, in an agony of suffering indescribable, struggled

back to life; but hardly to consciousness, for around him he saw hideous forms, of shape and size unreal, while demons yelled into his ears, and told him he was cursed for ever.

Throughout the greater portion of the night it had been necessary to use restraint, in order to keep the temporary lunatic — for such, in fact, he was — in his state-room; and Tony, a powerful African, to whom the care of him had been delegated, gave awful accounts afterwards to his brother negroes of the “goings-on” of the would-be suicide.

“He do swear and cuss awful,” he said, “and nuffin nebber keep him quiet. He call ebery minute for “Zoe,” and say dat chile try to kill him. Den I say dat Zoe drowned dar in de river; so dat kinder grigged him, and he went to sleep a bit.”

In the morning the report given to our heroine by the doctor was that the opiates he had given to her husband had taken effect, and that towards evening, when he should be awake, she might probably safely venture to see him.

“Safely!” Good Heavens! How the word grated on the poor girl’s ear! “Safely” — when her only hope lay in the chance that he or she might die, and that she might never see his hated face again.

Meanwhile, the ladies, every one of them, with no exception, looked very coldly, ay, and worse than coldly, on that lovely bride; and when, by a rare accident, she ventured from her small state-room, they turned their backs upon her; and if they chanced to

be within earshot of the poor, pale thing, they stopped their conversation, staring at her with supercilious looks, as if she were not worthy even to pick up the small crumbs which dropped from their exclusive lips.

It was not difficult to crush the spirit of the girl who knew she had been born a slave, and who had already, in the self-called philanthropic North, had some experience in the way those *Christian* people carry out their theories. It was certainly not a work of difficulty to bring the tears to her dark eyes, and add the extra "feathers's weight" of burthen and the last drop of bitterness to the all but overflowing cup. But, easy as was the cruel work, those fellow-women failed to make the girl a coward. Faint and weak, but fearless still, a night of prayer and self-inspection had sent her forth prepared to do her duty; and, hateful as that duty was, to flinch from it was not amongst the last resolves of the Octaroon.

She was in her state-room when the two gaily-dressed ladies lately returned from Mr. Morgan's plantation in the Brazos Bottom were talking so uncereemoniously of the bride's proceedings. For several hours there had been a lull in the state-room occupied by the victim of that fell disease—a disease from which so few on whom it lays its fangs can ever hope to escape, and which is known by the drearily-sounding name of *telirium tremens*.

During these hours of respite Zoe had been endeavouring to strengthen herself for the coming trial, the trial of watching by the sick-bed of him to whom she had so lately been bound by vows unchangeable;

and, worse misfortune still, of waiting in agonized expectation for the moment when, restored to health and vigour, the man she called her husband would remind her of her dreaded wife-like duties.

No need to dwell upon that time of horror and suspense — no need to describe in words the mental sufferings of one whom nature had endowed with a heart as warm as ever beat within a human bosom, and with a fine-strung delicacy of feeling which caused her to shrink with nervous sensitiveness from anything approaching to coarseness or unwarranted familiarity.

The fair Clorinda was looking her best as, with her hands in the pocket of her paletot, and with a little jaunty hat adorned with the long feathers of the "tailor bird," placed on the summit of her well-poised head, she paced the hurricane-deck side by side with a gentleman from Galveston, whom we will designate as Mr. Pierce.

Miss Clorinda was not troubled with shyness, so that before they had taken half-a-dozen turns her attendant had gone the length of telling her, in transatlantic fashion, that she was right-down lovely — "everlastin' handsum" — all the agreeable truisms, in short, to which young ladies of Clorinda's stamp answer with an abortive attempt at a blush, while they encourage a repetition of the well-appreciated impertinence by all the arts which long experience has taught them how to practise. Her chaperone did not trouble her greatly with her presence, inasmuch as she had seated herself on a camp-stool, and had, with a congenial gossip, returned to the subject of Zoe and her delinquencies.

Night was beginning to close in, when a succession of frightful screams evidently proceeding from the cabin of John L. Morse arrested everyone's attention, and caused Clorinda to say crossly,

"Ah, there is that horrible noise again! Can nothing be done to stop it? Upon my word, such people should stay at home —"

"Or remain under water when they have the luck to get there," said Mr. Pierce, laughing.

"It is very well for you to laugh," suggested Clorinda, ill-temperedly enough, "but you haven't got to go down as we have, and spend the evening close to that dreadful man's state-room. I was afraid every moment last night that he'd break out and come amongst us — and I didn't feel like fighting I can tell you — that's a fact."

"You should have sent to me to fight your battles," said Pierce, gallantly. "I'd have brought my shooting-irons — only the ladies would have been sorter skeered, I reckon."

"Well, but Mr. Pierce," persisted Clorinda, "isn't it a shame to have to go into the ladies' saloon, and hear that monster raving? It's beginning to rain too, so we must go down — And there's sister beckoning to me. Oh, law, what a bore it is."

"Why can't you fair ladies give us the pleasure of your company for an hour just to see the play?" said Mr. Pierce, gallantly. "We nearly split ourselves with larfing last night, seeing two rowdy fellows play at poker — and there's a quiet chap to-night going to tackle one of 'em, I reckon. One of the blacklegs —

a reglar river sharper — thinks he'll nobble him, but shouldn't be surprised if broad-brim warn't too much for him arfter all."

Well aware was the amiable Mr. Pierce of the moral impossibility that his suggestion should be complied with, for even the off-hand Mrs. Morgan and her sister-in-law, despite their desire to do what they considered a "fast thing," were not equal to setting aside public opinion to the extent so daring an innovation demanded. They refused, therefore, the well-meant invitation at once, tempting, although it might be, to spirits so independent to witness the exciting scene of half-intoxicated men playing at poker under a running fire of bets, oaths, and tobacco juice.

When Mr. Pierce descended with his convoy of floating crinolines from the hurricane-deck, almost all the first-class male passengers on board were already assembled in the fore-part of the vessel, smoking, drinking, gambling, or making extravagant bets on the skill and luck of those engaged either at cards or dice.

Vast and oppressive were the fumes, both of alcohol and tobacco, proceeding the length of the main deck, from the lawless precincts of the bar; and, moreover, so frightful was the uproar, that the ladies, strong-minded though they were, gladly made their escape from it into the after-saloon, which is exclusively appropriated to the ladies and their followers, preferring apparently the raving of the lunatic close by, to the unpleasant sights and sounds which prevailed in the foremost compartment of the vessel.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee — Devil."

THE last display of noisy violence on the part of the delirious patient was comparatively short, being mercifully abridged by a strong opiate administered to him by the doctor.

"He is better, certainly, my dear madam," was the latter's report to Zoe, when by her request he visited her in the gallery in front of her state-room.

"He is better, and I really think it would be advisable when he awakes for you to visit him. There is no reason for alarm," he added, answering to the change which with professional quickness he had noticed on the young girl's face. "Mr. Morse is evidently blessed with an extremely strong constitution, and I should not be surprised if, with care — with great care and prudence, he would recover this unfortunate attack very speedily — more speedily indeed than I had at first any reason to hope."

A weary sigh was Zoe's only answer, and the worthy doctor, who was a man past middle age, and the father of grown-up daughters, looked at her with some appearance of displeasure.

"I will see your husband when he awakes," he said coldly, "and in the meantime —"

"You will not desert me," interrupted Zoe, speak-

ing with passionate earnestness. "I have not a single friend in all this ship — no friend I think in all the world — and if you give me up — if you think me wicked — Oh, doctor, say that you will not quite abandon me — say that —"

But here the impossibility of explaining satisfactorily to the worthy doctor the singular position in which she found herself, struck her with sudden force, and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a fit of weeping perfectly uncontrollable. Seeing that it was useless to expect — for the time at least — any solution of the mystery in which the bride was enveloped, the doctor left her to claim his own share of the amusements within his reach.

Mr. Pierce was not without warranty for his gossiping assertion, namely, that a match at the exciting and highly intellectual game of poker was about to be played between two parties, whose extreme (apparent) dissimilarity of character and standing, bade fair to give the match an amount of very unusual interest.

Mr. Braddell, the individual designated by Pierce, under the rather disrespectful *sobriquet* of broadbrim, was a large and powerfully-made man of about fifty years of age, and having something of the homely Old World appearance of a New England farmer.

His dress differed considerably in material and fashion from that of the majority of the passengers, his "suit" being of honest broad cloth, cut according to a bygone taste, and his beaver hat — a kind of "cross" between a "chimney-pot" and wide-awake,

displaying the broadness of brim which had earned for the wearer the nickname applied to him by the lively young Texan lawyer.

Another cause for the kind of attention attracted by Braddell, was the fact that according to Pierce, who had evidently watched his proceedings narrowly, the said middle-aged gentleman "went in," as the former termed it, for religion, having a Bible on board; and not unfrequently words upon his lips implying that he was an Abolitionist at heart, and one filled with the grandest and most Utopian schemes for the happiness of the whole human race.

It had been remarked, in addition to these tokens of singularity, that of all the heterogeneous company on board the "John C. Calhoun," Mr. J. Q. A. Braddell was the one *honoured* by the familiar notice of the wealthy, dissipated Morse. Putting then these circumstances together, the curiosity manifested when the demure-looking Puritan accepted the challenge of the "cute" individual well known as an experienced river sharper can easily be imagined. The motives of the former gave rise to many and varied suggestions. Was he about to fall a victim, as hundreds had done before him, to the sleight-of-hand and unmitigated rascality of his opponent? Or might it be that Braddell had it in his power to teach a lesson to the boastful blackleg to be remembered, haply, long after the present voyage of the "John C. Calhoun" should have passed into oblivion.

But whatever the cause, certain it is, that on that

same especial game, called "poker," was one in which bets were numerous, and conjectures rife.

Already, when Dr. Corsten (for that was the excellent physician's name) entered the precincts of the bar, the two widely dissimilar opponents had been for some time seriously and solemnly engaged upon the game. Around them were assembled their several backers, and so great was the amount of interest felt on the occasion, that silence — rare, indeed, in that locality — reigned for the time being amongst the spectators, in the ranks of whom Mr. Pierce was one of the foremost in doing the honours of the match.

"Look at 'em! He's fust chap is Braddell when his dander's riz. Yankees and weasels ain't often caught napping. Wouldn't say but he'll make a good operation there, spite the sharper's running, I expect."

There is no need to describe at length the game of poker, at which national amusement the men were engaged. It is sufficient to say that it greatly resembles brag, the four kings playing a prominent part; and that to obtain possession of those effigies of royalty is the ruling desire of each party engaged.

Anything more grave and decorous than the demeanour of James J. Quincy Adams Braddell, Esq., could hardly be conceived, and to judge from his countenance, a stander-by would never have realized, that on the result of the contest many thousands of dollars depended, and that he himself would, in the event of the tide of fortune turning against him, be a loser to a very considerable amount.

There was at last a pause in the game — a long, eloquent, exciting interval of silence and repose. It was the sharper's turn to play; but instead of doing so, he, to the utter astonishment of the lookers on, laid his cards down upon their faces, saying as he did so, with an expression of bewildered surprise, ludicrous in the extreme,

"My Gosh! What on Gord's airth's become of the kings?"

Not a muscle of the respectable stranger's face moved, nor did he betray by word or look either astonishment or anger.

"Well, now, stranger, I guess it's you should know something about that ere fact: howsoever, one's got down my boot I reckon, and the other two's up your sleeve."

"Creation! how we larfed," said Pierce, when he described the scene on the following morning to Miss Clorinda. "But Squaretoes took it all as easy as an old shoe."

"I say, you animated blacking pot," he says, speaking to Cicero, "you bring me a sherry cobbler, and a clean straw, and be slick about it, for I'm powerful dry."

Among the witnesses of this little episode, opinions were still at variance as regarded one of the principal actors in the comedy. There were not a few of the most clear-sighted ones who gave Mr. Braddell credit for a degree of smartness incompatible with honesty; and of those few, Dr. Corsten was one.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Art thou not

Most miserable?

Why miserable? —

No, I am what your theologians call
Hardened."

THE state-rooms or cabins appropriated to private individuals on board the Mississippi steamers, open, as everyone who has travelled up or down the river may remember, on the main saloon. The cabins themselves, in the larger vessels, are tolerably spacious, and contain a comfortably-sized bed, and room to move about in with some degree of satisfaction. A door nearly opposite the one leading into the saloon opens as I have more than once remarked, upon the gallery or balcony; and it was through the agency of those two doors that Dr. Corsten became on that night the discoverer of an important secret.

After the mirth occasioned by the "poker" scene had subsided, the doctor, lounging with his cigar in his mouth along the stern gallery, came at length to the door opening into Morse's cabin. To his surprise (for it was dark night now, the weather being rainy, and the moon hidden by clouds) he found the fastening unclosed, and the door ajar. His first impulse was to enter, and shutting it after him, to make all fast for the night. In this design, however, he was prevented

by the sound of voices within, and looking through the Venetian blind he perceived by the dim light of the flaming tallow candle, no less a person than Mr. J. Q. A. Braddell himself.

Perhaps under other circumstances the conscientious physician would have hesitated longer before he decided on an all-important course, namely that of listening for a few minutes, in order that some light might, by a rare possibility, be thrown on the mystery attending Morse's union with Zoe.

The fact of John Link's standing to him in the light of a patient would hardly have been, in his opinion, sufficient excuse for this unwarrantable step, but the case had begun (principally owing to the sight of Zoe's unmistakable wretchedness) to interest him not a little, added to which he had caught a few words from Braddell which in no trifling degree tended to increase the feeling of suspicion against that gentleman, which had already begun to creep over his mind.

"You know this won't do," the visitor was saying in one of those whispers which while they are intended to be confidential, are apt to betray to a keen-eared listener infinitely more than they conceal. "You know this won't do — the game'll be all up if you're gwine on in this way — you'll be letting the cat out of the bag one of these days when you've got the horrors on you, and then we may as well tote away to Texas for any good we're likely to do in this here business."

The only reply from Morse to this exordium was a smothered groan.

"Well, cuss me," Braddell continued after a pause, "if you ain't a right down cowardly coon, and you bake me into hoe-cakes if you ever catch me gwine pardners in niggers or any other concerns from this to Almighty smash. We've got the gal on board, and she's worth ten thousand dollars if she's worth a cust red cent, and if you don't look alive I'll do the operation outer hand myself and you may go to ——"

"There's no call to hurry," answered a feeble voice from the bed, "and ——"

But what more he would have attempted to say was arrested by a storm of smothered execrations from his companion, accompanied by arguments of the coarsest description, clothed in terms of still more disgusting ribaldry, tending to prove that the beautiful girl by whom Morse was accompanied (and to whom he had been joined by a ceremony which was evidently invalid) was the joint property of those two unscrupulous villains, and that one, at least, of them was determined that the girl's market value should not in any way be lessened or deteriorated.

Horror-struck and disgusted by these unrefuted revelations, the doctor retired to his own state-room to ponder on the best means to be adopted in order to free the lovely *white* girl from the power of two as ruffianly miscreants as ever disgraced humanity.

That considerable caution would be necessary in order to ensure success, he was well aware; for it was

scarcely within the bounds of possibility that such crafty conspirators would have become possessed of such a prize without legal title; while, on the other hand, there was the recent marriage of the girl to Morse, — a fact of which several persons on board had spoken with certainty.

Under all these circumstances the wisest course that presented itself to Corsten was to wait quietly till the morning, and then endeavour to obtain from Zoe herself the particulars of the singular position in which she was placed.

What further measures to be taken would of course depend on the unhappy girl herself; but the doctor was fully resolved to reveal to her at once every item of the conversation he had overheard, as the best means of putting her on her guard against her formidable enemies.

Before retiring for the night he paid a visit to the ladies' saloon, of which he had the entrée; and rather to his surprise he observed the object of his meditations seated with, although at a considerable distance from, the other ladies, and reading quietly.

He wished her good-night, holding out his hand to her kindly. She looked up in his face, and a faint smile, so sad and sweet, that it haunted him afterwards for days, parted her trembling lips.

"You are very good," she murmured; "I know you are my friend, and God will reward you when I am dead, or far away."

"Hush!" he said in the same low tone. "Cherish

more hopeful thoughts, and above all keep up your strength and courage. I have something of importance to say to you to-morrow; in the meantime stay as much as possible in your own state-room, and I will endeavour to save you both from injury and insult."

He was gone before Zoe could speak one word of thanks, and the ladies, angry at the exclusive notice he had bestowed upon the tabooed girl, were still commenting in no measured terms on the bad taste displayed by their visitor, when Zoe, reassured by his encouraging expressions, laid herself down upon her bed, and slept for the first time for many nights the refreshing, dreamless sleep of youth and innocence.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Sorrow breaks seasons and reposing hours,
Makes the night morning, and the noontide night."

"You have heard all my story now. I have kept nothing from you; and my shame, my lost happiness, and my painful sacrifice are laid bare before you. I have wished to do my duty, but my trial seems greater than I can bear, and indeed, I hardly think that in the world there lives a being whose lot is more sad and pitiable than mine."

He had a winning manner with him, that cordial-hearted doctor; and Zoe had needed little persuasion to reveal her secrets to the only friend she had. And when the final words had passed her lips, but not till then, he, cautiously and with a gentle gravity, repeated to her the conversation he had overheard, and how her liberty was threatened by those two black-hearted men who were in evident conspiracy against her.

Zoe listened with an absorbed and breathless interest; but, strange to say, instead of fear, a hope — faint, it is true, and very shadowy — gleamed in upon her heart.

"If only," she thought, "that good, kind doctor would assist me to escape;" and, moved by this idea, she said imploringly —

"He is my husband — that is my worst and direst misfortune. I have no fear of being *sold*; but to be in the power of a wretch capable of meditating so vile a project — Ah! doctor, surely you will not leave me in his hands — me, a free girl — a free white Christian girl — white as your own young daughters — reared to love all things virtuous, fearing God, and hating wickedness. Forgive me, sir, for sounding my own praises; but I am very friendless — so friendless and forlorn that — and may God and the blessed Virgin pardon me! — I would welcome death this day rather than live to do what you may think my duty."

"Poor child! poor girl!" said the doctor, feelingly; "your case is indeed a hard one; and do not fear that I shall stop half-way, and leave undone the work I have commenced. But you said just now that you were free; and if so, why, half your trouble is already over. A free woman — pardon me, a *lady* — has important rights in this country, and you are not in the North," he added, with a smile, "where the mere suspicion that your great-grandsire was of coloured blood would call down insult on your head. An Octaroon, dear madam, beautiful and highly-educated as yourself, will meet with due consideration in these Southern States of ours; and we will show this more than semi-barbarian Yankee that he cannot with impunity insult our virtuous ladies, and carry them away for his own nefarious purposes, and to fill his pockets with the dollars that he worships."

The doctor was gradually working himself into a

passion as he dilated on Zoe's wrongs and the Northerner's shameless conduct. They were pacing the hurricane-deck alone, for it was early morning, and the majority of the passengers had scarcely yet left their berths. Zoe was gratified to find that her companion advocated her cause so warmly: and after thanking him with an emotion which partook of her own impulsive character, she said, sadly —

"I cannot see my way clearly in this matter. Is it not my dreadful duty to abide my fate beside the man who, argue as we may, and wickedly as he may act, is still my husband — still the one who, only three short days ago — how wearily the time has passed! — stood with me before God's sacred altar, and vowed, even as I did, to be true?"

"He swore to a lie," rejoined the doctor, bluntly. "The marriage was a cheat, and —"

"God grant it," broke in Zoe, fervently, "for then I should, I trust, be free again. Ah," she continued, interrupting herself, and breaking into a passion of mingled tears and laughter — "I should be too happy — I should break my heart for joy — I should go mad, I think," and seizing the good doctor's hand, she kissed it with fervent thankfulness.

Dr. Corsten was a little taken aback by this sudden and overpowering burst of feeling. Had Zoe been what is commonly described as an "ordinary young woman," he would have borne the gentle caress with philosophic calmness, but the young lady being as she was — beautiful exceedingly, he felt his pulses throb in a

fashion which brought forcibly to his mind the excellent Mrs. Corsten in her matronly cap and sober "front" — the wife of thirty years, and the mother of his goodly half-dozen of sons and daughters. The image, all praise be to his honest heart, brought with it no pain; but only a wholesome consciousness that he was old enough to be the grandfather of the pretty pleader by his side; so, steadying himself at once, and easily, he said, while patting paternally the little hand that still held his own,

"Calm yourself, my dear — I like to see young ladies quiet. It is safer — better both for themselves and for their friends; and now, as we may find it needful for our purpose, suppose you tell me all about this freedom you have spoken of. Your father, you say, gave you your liberty — have you your manumission papers in your own possession?"

"In my writing-desk," said Zoe, quickly, "where I have always kept them, and the desk itself has rarely left my sight."

"Right — you have done wisely. Such documents were too precious to be entrusted to any other human being than yourself."

"Shall I show them to you?" asked the girl, eagerly; "and will you keep them for me? They will be safer in your possession than in mine."

To this proposition the doctor willingly assented, and Zoe, with a light step, hastened down the ladder, and thence into her own state-room.

It took her but a moment to unlock the little

writing-desk which contained all (and they were but few) of the letters and written documents that she valued. Her hand did not tremble, for she had no fear of the result, while drawing out the secret receptacle and searching for its contents. Twice and again she looked, but she might have spared herself the trouble, for when every — even the minutest — scrap of writing had been turned over and examined, it became plain as the light of day to the panic-stricken Zoe that the hand of treachery had been at work, and that her manumission papers had disappeared from the place of fancied security where they had been deposited.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Oh, shame! oh, shame! Why do I walk abroad
By daylight, when the very sunshine mocks me,
And voices, and familiar sights and sounds
Cry, 'Hide thyself!'"

LET those who can speak from experience of the terrible revulsion of feeling caused by such a shock as I have described, imagine the despair of the unhappy Octaroon, when the reality of her loss could be no longer doubtful. At first she felt completely stunned, and sat down upon the edge of her bed with a blank, meaningless face, as if the blow had struck her into idiotcy.

It seemed as though she had never fully appreciated till now the priceless value of the papers, through whose agency alone she could walk the earth free as her fellow-woman, and safe from the devouring fear, that through the medium of that soul-defiling thing called gold, she might be handed over like a piece of merchandise, and she a feeling, sentient woman, with a conscience like as other women have — a heart too, and a soul destined to live again (according to the Promise given), in other, better worlds than ours.

All this was over now — this chance for her — this hope, and loop-hole of escape. There was only left to tell her mournful story to that kind, good man (a tale it was, which, perhaps, he would believe not), and then to take up her cross — poor burthened soul — and carry it bravely through life's weary journey.

She joined the doctor with a slow, lingering step, and a face on which her utter hopelessness was so plainly written, that he saw at once there was bad news to tell.

"Doctor," she said, humbly, and the tears would rise to her dark piteous eyes, "Doctor, I hope — I pray that you will not think I have deceived you wilfully — I thought, indeed I did, that I was free. I know with what contempt even the good and generous view the slave; and I have now to tell you, that the papers given me by my father have been taken — stolen, it must be — from my desk, and that I have no more right to liberty than any poor black being in this boat, who, for aught we know, may have been chaffered for a dozen times or more, and dare not even call the soul that God has given him, his own."

She had spoken at first meekly and tearfully; but as she proceeded, her sense of wrong roused her into pastionate energy, and the wondrous beauty, which had before been dimmed by grief, assumed a form so splendid that Corsten gazed upon it as something more than human.

And could he now desert her? Could he assist to place this innocent child within the power of a vulgar sensualist — a sordid, mean adventurer — for these were among the epithets conjectured by Dr. Corsten to be applicable to John Link Morse; and not conjectured only, for in the city of Galveston — Galveston, where the worthy doctor generally abided — more than one ugly story, of which the slave-dealer was the hero, and which had chanced during the latter's frequent pilgrimages to Texas, had reached the ears, and shocked

the judgment, of the medical practitioner, whose professional offices had been so useful in restoring the offender to life, and to society.

Of Zoe and her antecedents he knew nothing, save what the girl herself had told him; but her touching story was corroborated by her every word and look — by the soft refinement traceable in each exquisitely feminine movement, and by a sweet virgin modesty, not to be temporarily adopted or “put on.”

“This is bad news,” he said, after a few moments given to reflexion, “and will increase our difficulties, inasmuch as I greatly fear we have the arm of the law against us. I can see no other course than for you to land at night, and under cover of the darkness, at any quiet wooding station we may come upon, after the rest of the passengers have retired to their berths. It is a rough alternative,” he added, attributing Zoe’s silence to a distaste for the plan proposed, “but I can think of nothing better; for this brute who calls himself your husband, is getting well apace, and if you would elude his grasp, and that of his fellow-scoundrel, it seems to me that you have no time to lose.”

“No time to lose,” indeed, repeated Zoe, speaking in the low, concentrated tones of deep emotion, “and therefore, gladly would I go at once, and put the breadth of leagues between me and my persecutors.”

“But this being wholly out of the question,” rejoined the doctor, with a smile which he intended to be encouraging, “my advice is, that you bide your time patiently and quietly, and after making all the

necessary preparations, trust entirely to me as to the best time for putting your plan into execution."

Instead of replying, the girl, whose heart was too full for words, put out her small, ungloved hand to her kind adviser, who pressed it cordially.

"My dear," he said, "I am an old man, and know well what I should feel were one of my own daughters to be exposed to such a trial as this. For it is a trial to be left in the dead of night in a wild and desolate spot, away from human habitations, or what might be far worse, with those around to whom chivalrous feelings are unknown, and who would be more likely to insult than to protect a woman whom they found alone and undefended."

"I do not think I should be afraid," said Zoe, resolutely. "I should be supported by the blessed memory that I had escaped from what would have been a thousand times worse than death." And then she continued, with a quiet simplicity which deeply touched the heart of her auditor: — "I should not leave the river's side, and the Mississippi's banks, as I have heard, are rarely shelving. The water, too, is high, and to die would be no great misfortune either to myself or others."

There was a quiet heroism — the heroism of true courage in the Octaroon's low, unboastful tones; and the doctor felt satisfied that she was one who, in moments of emergency, might be safely entrusted with the guardianship of that priceless gift — her honour.

"You have money, I suppose?" he asked, rather abruptly, for like most men, he was desirous of concealing

the emotion that he felt. "You have money, I suppose, and friends, perhaps, elsewhere than in New Orleans?"

Her thoughts flew back at once to Seymour, and to the possible chance of meeting him once more. The idea would, indeed, have been one of ecstasy, but for the fatal ties which she believed still bound her to the man from whose power she was plotting to escape.

The vows she had spoken were never long absent from one with whom religion and principle were something more than imposing forms and high-sounding words, and she answered, sadly,

"I have enough money, I believe, for my present wants, but I am utterly friendless, if I except an uncle of my father's, Mr. Burns, an elderly gentleman, who now lives in Philadelphia, and who, I think, would shelter me till I could find some means of supporting myself."

"Mr. Burns!" exclaimed the doctor, joyfully. "Not surely Mr. R. Briscoe Burns?"

"The very same. Do you know him, then? It is many years, I fancy, since he was at the South."

"Not so many, my dear young lady, but that I can well remember when — but there is no time now for going back to old days — when I had hardly passed my boyhood, and *he*, though grown to man's estate, did not altogether despise the company of the raw medical student; for I had not been to Europe then, and had not shaken off so much as one of the narrow prejudices which tend to make us Americans very ridiculous, I am sorry to say, in the eyes of men more enlightened and wide-seeing than ourselves.

Enough, however, of myself, although it may be that Mr. Burns may not have quite forgotten Randolph Corsten. You will speak of me to him, when you find yourself safe in Philadelphia, and when —”

“*When*, indeed!” broke in the agitated girl, “you speak of my escape as certain; when those men, my *owners* — the men who share this ‘lot’ (is not that the name I go by?) between them, might at any instant claim me as a *chattel*, and the law, far from protecting me, would uphold them in the deed.”

“Too true, and therefore the more necessity for caution and for speed. At present everything appears likely to favour us in the execution of our project. The night bids fair to be both dark and rainy, so that the hurricane-deck will not probably be occupied by any idle loungers: and from all that I can learn, the hour of twelve will be about the time when we may expect to arrive at the Wooding Station.”

“Oh that we were there already!” exclaimed Zoe, fervently.

“I say amen to that prayer. But nevertheless, the more I dwell upon the inconveniences, and perhaps the actual dangers that await you, the more painfully I feel that nothing but the direst necessity, nothing short of an alternative so shocking that I shudder to think of it, would justify my suggesting that you should land this night alone and unprotected on the borders of that gloomy, pathless forest.”

“Do not fear for me,” said the Octaroon, in answer to this outbreak of sympathy. “I dread nothing but

these cold-blooded Northern speculators in human flesh. Nothing but them, and the possibility that in the sight of Heaven I am that monster's wife. Could I but feel assured that this hated marriage were invalid, I would throw myself this night on the protection of a merciful Providence, and feel as safe in that vast, silent forest as though I were walking by my mother's side in the old plantation shrubbery at home."

"If that be all your cause for alarm I think I can venture to set your mind at ease, for as truly as that I stand here beside you do I believe that the ceremony you speak of was a mockery, and part and parcel of the deep devices by which these men succeeded in entrapping you hither. But hark! I hear the gong sounding for breakfast. One last word only, for it is important that we should not be seen in conference together. Take nothing with you but the merest travelling necessities; put on your simplest dress, and when you hear my whistle out-side your door — the one I mean that leads upon the gallery — come out at once, and follow me at a short distance down to the lower deck. That done, leave all the rest to me."

Only a moment had the Octaroon to thank him and promise obedience to the orders he had given, for a sound of feminine voices rose up from the saloon deck to the place on which they stood, and in another moment Miss Clorinda Morgan's well-plumed hat and masculine paletot were seen above the ladder, and a noisy "good-morning" to the popular Dr. Corsen announced that, for the present at least, quiet and rational conversation was at an end.

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Thou readest well the misery
Told in those faded eyes; but much doth sleep
Within, which there the poor heart loves to keep
Or dare not write on the dishonoured brow.
Even from our childhood have we learn'd to steep
The bread of slavery in the tears of woe,
And never dreamed of hope or refuge until now.

"No bosom can withstand
Thee, wondrous lady! and the mild command
Of thy soft eyes. Yet *thou'rt* a wretched slave,
Reft from thy wonted loves and native land."

IN one respect fate was decidedly propitious to the unhappy being who, for many hours, and especially since the evening had begun to darken into night, had been a prey to all the varied miseries attendant on suspense; the which miseries were aggravated by scruples of conscience pricking painfully the sides of her intent. Through the long, wearying hours of daylight, Zoe had neither seen nor heard anything of the two men whom she looked upon, and with reason, as her deadliest enemies. To the watchful but secret surveillance of the kind-hearted doctor, she attributed this blessed respite; to him also did she owe it that, during the long hour of dinner, the attention of the odious Braddell was diverted from herself by the continual calls upon his notice, made by the individual whom he was very far from suspecting as a rival in "smartness" and powers of intrigue.

"We're likely enough to have a good time up-river," remarked the doctor; "and time's money to me, as it is to most of us, I expect."

Of course, and, even as Corsten had intended should be the case, Braddell's curiosity was excited.

"Going far up-river, sir?" he asked. "Don't hail from these parts, I expect? — could a'most have sworn that you was raised Boston way." Corsten smiled.

"I was not aware that there was anything very betraying in my mode of speech," he said; "and in this instance it has certainly misled you, for I was born on a Southern plantation, and my practice is almost entirely confined to Galveston."

The dinner was nearly over by the time that Braddell, worked up to a true Northern pitch of inquisitiveness, touched, with little preliminary hesitation, on the all-engrossing subject of the peculiar "institution." It was, of course, the doctor's clue to pretend that he was a zealous supporter of the divine right of slave-owners, and an upholder — ay, even to the death — of the great power so soon to be shaken to its very foundation by the selfish Northern schemers for self-aggrandizement and individual interests.

A long and apparently confidential dialogue ensued between the doctor and his new acquaintance — a dialogue which resulted in a conviction on Braddell's part that, very far from aiding in the escape of one of those proscribed ones, who bear about with them the "curse of Cain," the worthy medico would go all lengths in assisting to recover the legal human possession of a

slave-owner, defrauded, by the silly, liberty-loving creatures, of his lawful rights.

Meanwhile, and according to the prediction of the weather-wise on board the "John C. Calhoun," the clouds overhead had gathered into denser blackness; a heavy weight, oppressive and charged with electricity, hovered in the overloaded atmosphere; and everything portended one of those terrific thunderstorms which, followed, as they usually are, by positive torrents of rain, are for ever visiting the valley of the Mississippi.

Night had closed in, and ten o'clock had struck, when the first distant warning of the coming tempest made itself heard, and the ladies still remaining on the hurricane-deck hastened below, after convincing themselves by waiting for the faint flash which followed at the distance of scarcely twenty seconds, that the storm would soon be upon them, and that it was time to seek for shelter in the saloon.

The heat throughout the afternoon had been oppressive in the extreme, and every door and window had in both saloons been left open, to admit of any wandering breath of air which might be sent in charity to relieve the sufferings of the complaining, panting passengers.

"Oh! that the rain would fall." "If only the storm would break upon us in a water-spout."

This was the burden of every complaint, as denser and denser grew the tempest-laden atmosphere, and even the most hardened amongst those reckless men began to experience that strange and inexplicable op-

pression of spirit which we may all remember to have felt when a crisis which cannot in the natural order of things be avoided, is for some unaccountable reason unseasonably delayed.

It wanted but half an hour to midnight when the first loud echoing thunder-crash came peeling over the silent woods. Few were on the upper deck then, for it was the hour when play usually engrossed its fullest share of attention; and there were not many on board who cared much for Nature's wondrous works, or who would have exchanged the excitement of gambling for an hour's watching of the grand forked-lightning playing amongst the ink-black clouds — those tower-crowned giants marshalled for the elemental war.

The Octaroon, shut up closely in her own state-room, listened to the clamour without, and rejoiced greatly thereat. It was, she thought, just the night on which such an act as the one she was about to perpetrate might be safely and opportunely accomplished; for, as we have seen, Zoe was still enduring struggles with her conscience, nor could she forget that only three days had elapsed since she had vowed to love, honour, and obey (till death should part her from him) the man whom she was leaving, to support alone the sickness which, for aught she knew, might be a mortal one; while she — ah, if in this act of hers she was a criminal, her sin, she knew, would find her out, and mercy be denied her in her sorest strait.

But despite these mild reproaches suggested by a timid spirit, Zoe listened with heartfelt gratitude to

the pelting of the storm without, and when the angry thunder boomed above her, and the blue lightning flashed across her eyes through the white curtain of her cabin-window, she hailed their coming as if friends were near her; and taking out for the hundredth time her little jewelled watch, she counted the moments which must intervene before she could hope to hear outside the welcome signal for departure.

How often in after-years did the Octaroon recall the memory of that hour! How often in fancy did the wild rush of the "unresting sounds" come back to her — the pelting of the rain in sharp hail-like drops upon the deck — the deafening tumult of Heaven's grand artillery; while, and, like a meek running treble, a feeble human accompaniment to the grand "music of the spheres," a band of itinerant musicians struck up one of the favourite airs from the "Pirata," and played it with undaunted vigour under the disadvantages I am endeavouring to describe.

"I shall hardly hear him when he comes," the girl said to herself, and she opened the outer door to listen with a better prospect of success.

A fierce rush of wind and rain poured in upon her, for her state-room was on the "weather" side, and the full force of the tempest was spreading itself against those frail wooden bulwarks.

In a moment her candle was extinguished, and but for the fitful gleams of the rapidly-succeeding electric flashes, Zoe would have found herself in darkness. Happily she was already almost equipped for her

nocturnal expedition. She had found among the travelling wraps taken as precautions against a colder climate, a large and dark plaid-cloak, the hood of which, when drawn over her head, almost entirely concealed her face. This, and a brown merino dress which she had brought with her from Paris, were her only safeguards — slight ones indeed — against the wet and cold; and when I add that her little *bottines* were not *à doubles semelles*, and that she did not boast even the smallest of those useful things called umbrellas, I think it will be allowed that poor Zoe's chances of catching what is called her "death of cold" were decidedly on the ascendant.

In the meantime, instead of abating, the fury of the tempest seemed to increase. Nearer and nearer came the now almost incessant flashes. More terribly thundered the crashing voices from the dense, rent clouds. Down poured the tropic-like rain, as though it were a waterspout, while the wandering musicians, having changed their gentler tones to a more popular and grander melody, blew out "Hail Columbia" from their nearly-exhausted throats, and put the climax to the bewildering chorus.

Zoe stood with the hand upon the handle of her door, which she held a few inches open, that she might not lose the longed-for signal. And her heart beat fast, as, with every nerve strained to the highest pitch, and the lightning, ever and anon casting a livid glow upon her fair, excited face, she watched behind her shelter.

In one hand she held a small travelling bag, con-

taining a few articles of absolute necessity; and in a place of security in her dress, she had placed her money and her watch, with a few trinkets, and what she valued above all the rest, her mother's miniature.

When all was in readiness, and she had to wait in inaction, then, and not till then, did her watch become almost unbearable. Suspense is, as we all know, very hard to bear, and the minutes seemed to lengthen out a thousandfold when the hour of twelve had struck, and as yet she had caught no sound of welcome warning, nor had the vessel relaxed, by a single iota, its rate of speed.

Another fifteen minutes — a weary time of eager longing — and then she thought, but it might be only fancy, that the "John C. Calhoun" "walked the waters less like a thing of life;" or, to use more prosaic words, that the vessel appeared preparing to stop.

The idea, at first a vague one, soon became, even to Zoe's unpractised judgment, a certainty; for in a few minutes more she was conscious that they were no longer in motion, and that for her the time for action had come at last! Wrought up to a degree of agitation, which threatened almost to deprive her of the power of self-guidance, the girl stepped out in the drenching rain upon the gallery, and there, emerging at that very moment from another and adjacent cabin, she perceived a figure which she at once guessed to be that of her kind friend the doctor — a suspicion, in which she was confirmed by hearing, proceeding from his lips, the low significant whistle which she had been so long and so anxiously expecting.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"He came like a dream in the dawn of life;
He fled like a shadow before its noon:
He is gone, and my peace is turned to strife,
And I wander and wane like the weary moon.
Oh, sweet echo! wake,
And for my sake,
Make answer the while my heart shall break."

READER! Has it ever fallen to your lot to witness a "wooding" scene at night on the banks of the Mississippi? If it has not (and the chances are decidedly against it), you will hardly be able to realize the effects produced by an amount of noise, bustle, and hurry, thoroughly transatlantic in their intensity, and by an evident and utter carelessness as regards human convenience and human life, which are equally characteristic of an undeniably go-a-head people.

The "John C. Calhoun" had come to a standstill by the side of a small pier, on which were heaped up countless "cords" of wood, under the apparent superintendence of a coal-black negro, who was awaiting the steamer's advent, lantern in hand, upon the bank.

Without the delay of a moment, the labouring "hands" — coloured slaves — and (so called, for we will give them the benefit of the doubt) *free* Irish labourers, were busy at the work of transferring the split logs of cottonwood from the shore, to their appointed place on board the steamer.

The whole business, from the multiplicity of the persons engaged, was likely to be only an affair of minutes; and during that time, amongst the numbers who thronged the decks and pier, it was easy enough, under the heavily-falling rain, for Zoe to make her way upon the wooden piles jutting out into the river.

No one of all those many passengers, busied in, and excited by, their own affairs of pleasure or of business, would look for the lonely Octaroon, whose wont it was to pass so many hours of the day in solitude. Stealthily and alone, for in that lay her best chance of safety, she stepped (shrouded by her plaid) from the vessel which contained almost her only friend, as well as those who, if she might trust to him, were conspiring so iniquitously against her liberty. There was no failing in her heart as she placed her foot upon the slender plank, for it was little more, that lay between her and the rapid-running river. One silent pressure of the hand — a last "God bless you" given and received; and then, sinking down upon the wet, cold ground, she strove to hide herself amongst the piled-up heaps of wood from any prying eyes which might by chance be looking upon the scene from out that huge floating hostelry.

She might have made her mind at ease on that score, for in those gorgeously-decorated saloons, where youth and beauty and the lovers of pleasure improved each shining nightly hour in the way best suited to their individual tastes, she need have feared no *espionage*,

even if the comparative darkness on the shore, increased as it was by the heavily-falling rain, had not effectually concealed her from observation.

With her large hood drawn over her head, Zoe kept her tearless eyes fixed on the process which was being so rapidly carried on. No one on the bank had noticed her, for in the work there had not been an instant of delay, and already something of slackening in the movements of the toiling men told her that their labour was drawing to a close. The last log would soon be tossed on board, and then the mighty vessel would depart, and leave her on that watery bank alone.

She sat with her small hands clasped round her knees, silent and motionless as one of the swamp-worn fragments that rear their fast-decaying remnants above the unwholesome broad morass — the morass so near and hand, where the grey alligator reared his hideous head, and where the hunted negro,

“On the quaking turf of the green morass,
Crouched in the rank and tangled grass,
Like a wild beast in his lair.”

Zoe never thought of tales like these. She felt no fear, as she had truly said, of man or beast, but only a great desolation seemed spreading all around her; and when she saw the steamboat with its hundred lights glide slowly off, and vanish in the distance, she felt so forlornly and so utterly alone, that a kind of superstitious dread stole over her, and she would have wel-

comed any face, however hideous, or a spoken word, even though its utterer were an enemy.

For long she sat there — for an hour or more — and as yet no welcome sound of paddle-wheels working up steam was heard above the storm. The thunder had meanwhile abated in its violence, and the lightning flashes had grown faint and far between, though still the rain poured down with undiminished violence, and Zoe's scanty covering was utterly useless in defending her from its violence.

Drenched to the skin, chilled, numbed, and well-nigh despairing (so much has physical suffering to do with our mental powers of endurance), the hapless Octaroon began to fear at last that her woes would end that night, and that to those who found her lifeless body would it be left to surmise how and why she died there.

From the moment when she crouched behind the friendly pile of wood, she had not raised her patient head, but sat there with her large dark eyes fixed upon the murky river running so swiftly to the all-engulfing sea. At first she scarcely knew how cold and wet she was; and when the truth came home to her, to her surprise the rain had nearly ceased, a brisk fresh wind had risen, and between two storm-tossed clouds, dark, yet with light and fleece-like edges, the calm May-moon shone out, whispering to the o'ercharged heart, of peace above, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"They are gone, they have all passed by!
They have left me here to mourn!"

SHE looked up to the glorious heavens, and a faint shivering stole over her exhausted frame, as her thoughts came back to earth. For a moment she fancied that it would be bliss to die and be at rest; but the love of life was still strong within her youthful, healthy nature; and — for I have never described my heroine as perfect — it must be owned that the possibility of seeing the face of Charles Seymour once again gave her courage to do battle with her increasing weakness, and urged her to cast around her for some means of preserving her forlorn existence.

She endeavoured, but in vain, to remember if any steamer had been past by the "John C. Calhoun" since that vessel's memorable race with the vanquished "Magnolia." To the best of her belief there had been none; and if this were so, the chances were that the next steamer that came up-stream was the one on board of which Zoe's lover had taken his passage.

Even in her extremity of mental suffering and of bodily exhaustion the girl bitterly reproached herself with the share that this reflexion had had in her willingness to leave the vessel, for the great though uncertain perils which probably awaited her. But reproach herself as she would, there still remained the longing (stronger far than even love of life) to lay her head

once more on Charley Seymour's heart, and hear him say that he both loved and pardoned her.

For with true womanly self-abnegation and with an utter disbelief in the possibility of *his* unworthiness, the Octaroon clung to the conviction that she alone was to blame for Seymour's desertion, and that had she not, by perhaps an overstrained sense of duty, thwarted and justly angered him, she would at that very moment be by his side, his wife perhaps, or at least unfettered by the hateful chains which bound her to another.

But almost wholly as her mind was occupied by thoughts such as these, their intensity of bitterness did not prevent her from eagerly listening for any passing sound that might be wafted up the river to the little pier on which she sat and shivered. She listened eagerly, but the first breaking of the heavy silence came not from the water; nor was it the revolving paddle-wheels upon the resisting stream that made her start up with a feeble cry — a cry that was heard by those whose voices roused her from what might soon have become a death-like lethargy, so chilled was she by the cold river air that blew through her thin, wetted garments.

The voices were negro voices, and proceeded from a man and a boy who had come from a small shanty close at hand, with lighted torches in their hands. They heard Zoe's feeble exclamation, and looking round to see from whence it came, they soon perceived the crouching figure of the now almost speechless girl.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the man, who was a stout African of unmixed blood, "Gosh! dar is someone dar!

Somebody waiting — left behind from de steamer, p'raps." And as he spoke he lowered his torch (for the moon was hidden by a cloud) to obtain a better view of the object of his remarks.

The girl tried to speak, but her teeth chattered, and a convulsive shuddering of her frame prevented the words she used from being intelligible.

"She be a dying, mebbe," whispered the lad in awe-struck tones — whereupon his father (for in that relation he stood to the speaker) thrust the latter unceremoniously on one side, saying.

"Get out with you for a darned goney! — It's a lady, and she's only cold and skeered! But, by gosh! dere's de paddles we heerd past de bend; 'pears its de 'Magnolia;' day said in 'John Calhoun' dat she was coming up-river next. Now den, Jem, boy, you set to work first chop — dey'll stop to wood, and take in dis ere passenger, I kalkilate —" and then, as if moved by a sudden inspiration, the speaker turned to the lady, whose sudden appearance in that place was still a matter of the most hidden mystery to him, and said,

"Would missus like de stopping-signal made? mebbe dat steamer not stop for wood at dis place."

He waited for an answer, but in vain; for Zoe, although she fully comprehended his words, had, for the moment, completely lost the power of replying to them. The agony of that moment was one, the memory of which could not in the longest lifetime be effaced. Full well she knew that on her present recovery of speech might depend, not only her life, but

what she valued far beyond it, the one last glimpse of him she loved so well! But for all this, and struggle as she would with the dread difficulty, her half-palsied tongue refused to do its duty, and the constriction in her throat grew momentarily tighter.

The description of the poor girl's state has taken long to write, but scarcely a minute had, in fact, elapsed since the negro had announced the speedy approach of the boat, when, steaming on at high-pressure speed, in the bright moonlight, which had again almost turned the night to day, the "Magnolia," with her name written in letters of flame upon her side, came rushing by.

There was scarcely a moment for suspense — scarcely a moment in which to doubt whether or no she would wait there to "wood," or pass on at undiminished speed to a more distant station. If Zoe had entertained for a single instant the thought of endeavouring by any sign or signal to make her presence known, the idea was no sooner formed than abandoned; for past her dazzled eyes, the monstrous vessel flashed — close — so close, that the girl could have discovered in the clear night-air the features of those on board of her; and then, almost before a faint exclamation, the cry of something akin to despair, broke from the parched lips of the Octaroon — the very sound of the passing wheels had died away upon the surface of the water, and on the little pier crouched Zoe, still with those two coal-black faces looking with kindly curiosity on her pale, beautiful face.

CHAPTER XXX.

"I breathe again.

Come, gentle dreams, the hour of sleep beguile!

Oh! when shall he for whom I sigh in vain

Beside me watch to see my waking smile?"

"TINK she gwine to die?" asked Jem, in a panic-stricken whisper.

"Pears so," replied his parent, solemnly. "Anyway you'd better call Aunt Dinah. She lift de lady up, and take her into de cabin. Gib her whisky — she die else of cold."

Jem needed no entreaty (for he was superstitious, as are most of his race, and was glad of an excuse to escape from the melancholy sight) to induce him to summon the old woman, who, although she was known to both as "Aunt Dinah," was no relation to either; and who lived and "did for them" in the little shanty at the borders of the cottonwood forest.

Aunt Dinah had been lamed by an accident in early youth, and being incapacitated for active field or other work, had been placed in her present official situation by her owner, who was also the proprietor of that portion of the forest land, and of the two negroes whose office it was to fell the timber, cord the wood, and help to place it on board the vessels stopping at the station for the purpose.

Jem ran to the wooden hut as fast as his legs could

carry him, and soon returned, bringing with him a woman whose age might, from her appearance, have been estimated at eighty at least, but who was in reality twenty years short of that respectable period of life. Her gait was very halting, and her attire, especially considering the humid state of the atmosphere, scanty in the extreme; nevertheless, she came forward with alacrity, and on perceiving Zoe's helpless condition, did her part in conveying the now nearly inanimate form to the shanty. It was not at more than a hundred yards' distance; and, but for the position which the Octaroon had chosen, she could not have failed to perceive a light issuing forth not only through the ill-fitting planks, but also from the unglazed window of the log hut.

Inside it looked comfortable enough, and it consisted of two rooms, the men occupying the inner one as a sleeping place, while the other served for Dinah's use, and indeed, so far as that went, for "kitchen and parlour and all."

A bright wood fire blazed upon the hearth, and before it, on a mattress stuffed with maize leaves, they laid their light burthen down. Then the elder negro, Uncle Pomp, in spite of Dinah's opposition, took a pint-bottle of whisky from its hiding-place, and contrived, with considerable difficulty, to pour a few teaspoonfuls down the sufferer's throat.

The effect it produced on the young, healthy frame was almost instantaneous. A faint tinge of colour spread over the death-like face, and a few

gasping sighs told that she was struggling back to life.

"Dat right. Gib her anudder drop," said Jem, in an ecstasy of delight; but (and fortunately, perhaps, for Zoe) there were bounds to his worthy parent's liberality; nor was the supply of his beloved Monongahela so plentiful that it could be presented *ad libitum* to any suffering female, be she ever so beautiful in his sight. So Pomp returned the bottle to its place of concealment, and then with laudable discretion retired to the inner apartment, leaving his unexpected guest to the sole and undivided attentions of his "house-keeper."

It was not long before Zoe, warmed and refreshed, her wet garments removed, and her mind composed by a conviction of present security, was able to answer — with considerable reservation, however — Aunt Dinah's questions; and, what was infinitely more to her own advantage, to partake of the refreshments placed before her by that exemplary negress. These consisted of corn-cake hot from the baking-pan, molasses, and sweet potatoes roasted in the ashes. The hut contained but little furniture, and a wooden box placed by the fire served Zoe for a seat; the table was made of rough planks nailed coarsely together, and on the far side of it stood Dinah's spinning-wheel, with which she had been occupied before retiring to rest.

"I am afraid," said Zoe, as soon as she was able to speak coherently, "that you were awakened out of your sleep to come and help me. I believe I should

have died there but for you — I was so wet, and chilled almost to death. I shall never forget your kindness, and hope some day that I shall be able to reward you for your trouble."

"It was nuffin," Aunt Dinah said in reply. "I was glad ole man was along. An' so you land at the wrong place. My! dey berry stoopid, dose steamboat people."

"I landed at the wrong station, but it was my own fault; and now, if you do not mind letting me remain here till I get stronger — till to-morrow night I mean — I should be very thankful for the shelter, and — and — I can reward you all. I am not quite poor, and God will not forget in heaven the charity you have shown to a poor wandering soul on earth."

She hid her face in her hands as she spoke, weeping convulsively. Aunt Dinah did her best to comfort the forlorn creature, whom chance, as it appeared to the unsuspecting negress, had thrown in her way; and poor Zoe, thoroughly exhausted by all that she had undergone, laid herself down on the maize mattress, and covered by her cloak, sank into a troubled slumber.

They trod very softly, the next morning — those kind, simple creatures — speaking in whispers lest they should disturb the sleeping girl; while Dinah busied herself in preparing the morning meal, and in making such primitive toilette arrangements for her guest as circumstances allowed of.

Neither Pomp, nor his boy Jem, were to be seen when Zoe opened her dark, wondering eyes to the

light of day. The sun was high in the heavens, darting his warm rays through the open door, and lighting up the noble river with a flood of brilliant sky beams.

With the welcome light, Hope, "ever brightest when it dawns from fears," flashed like a rainbow's glory through the sanguine heart of the Octaroon. As age creeps on, the morning wakings, when the sun shines upon a wearied breast, are full of bitterness; but in youth — the proverb, that though "heaviness may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning," is, thanks be to a merciful Providence, oftentimes a true one, and never was it more fully exemplified than in the case of the lonely daughter of Jaspar Gordon.

The reaction from utter despair to a brighter, healthier view of her life's prospects, was very invigorating; and the sense of present liberty mightily encouraging. In the joy of her recovered freedom, present dangers were lessened in her sight, and rising from her bed, she greeted Aunt Dinah with a cordial "Good-morning" which brought a beaming smile to the face of that hospitable matron.

"Dat right — Ki! — if you ain't bright dis morning!" exclaimed the latter, looking admiringly at the fair young face — and then it was, "Where dat dirty nigger gone to? Dem kine o' people nebber in der way. I tell him he turn de griddle cakes, and soak 'em in de butter, and he nebber so much as catch de foul for dinner — de sarsy darkey!"

But in spite of Jem's manifold delinquencies, a

breakfast by no means of a despicable description, was placed before the fugitive. Very proud was Aunt Dinah of her handiwork, and although Zoe could eat little besides a banana, and a small corn-cake, the worthy negress was gratified by her thanks and compliments, to say nothing of the anticipated and more solid reward which had been promised her.

After breakfast Zoe wandered out into the forest, the silent, solemn forest, where the blue birds hopped from spray to spray, and nimble squirrels disported themselves in the pleasant shade. Tuneless and voiceless were those living denizens of the pathless woods, and very dark and gloomy grew the scene as the girl penetrated farther and still farther amongst the close-set stems of the cotton-wood trees, interlaced as they were with gigantic creepers, greenbriars, and the virgin grape vine.

And so the bright spring day sped on, and as it drew towards a close, the girl returned to her shelter, resolving there to wait till night-fall, and then to cause the usual, and never-neglected signal to be made upon the pier, which warns the passing steamers that a passenger desires to be taken on board.

Night came and found the Southern maiden once again upon the spot where she had so nearly yielded up her young life beneath the pitiless pelting of the storm. There was neither cold nor rain to suffer from now, but a soft cloudy sky above her head, and within her breast a hopeful, patient heart, waiting the approaching succour.

It came, as usual, with a rushing, panting note of warning, and as the advancing vessel slackened speed, even before she reached the bend, it became evident, greatly to Zoe's relief, that the intention of her captain was to take in a fresh supply of wood at the station. The parting arrangements of the Octaroon did not occupy many of the minutes accorded for the "wooding" process after the stoppage of the boat. A few kind words of thanks at parting from the worthy slaves — and a gift of a couple of dollars — (she could afford to bestow no more) as a guerdon for their services; and she was ready with quiet, gliding step, to creep, almost unobserved on board the "Crescent City," and take her humble station amongst the deck passengers.

And now, having conducted her so far on her journey, we will leave our heroine for awhile, and return for a short space to Charles Seymour, for whose unexpected appearance on board the boat, it is necessary, in some degree to account.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"The world is dreary,
And I am weary
Of wandering on without thee, Zoe!
A joy was erewhile
In thy face and thy smile,
And 'tis gone — now I am gone too — Zoe!"

"*Haïr c'est aimer encore.*" — And Charles Seymour, when he left New Orleans, with the evil passions engendered by hurt pride, and momentary doubt of Zoe's love boiling in his breast, was never nearer to idolizing her whom he often told himself that he detested.

Exceeding were the pains he took to convince himself that the girl who had refused to listen to his entreaties, was an object of indifference to him, and that never more would he desire to look upon her face. All this, again and again he repeated to himself, ignoring the fact, that these mental repetitions of unexisting truths were only so many proofs, that the force of the absorbing passion was still strong within him, and that like a torrent over which the ice has momentarily closed, it wanted but a ray of summer sunshine to make it flow again as swiftly and as brightly as before.

For two days and nights in the almost deserted Pontchartrain hotel, Seymour fretted away the hours in moody silence; but this was a state of things im-

possible to last, especially after the inroad of certain alarms which the lonely man endeavoured, but in vain, to reason into shadows.

"What," he asked himself, "if some sudden and irremediable evil were menacing that lovely girl? She had spoken to him of the revolting chance of a marriage, at some future time, with Morse. At first, such a profanation seemed too much out of the bounds of possibility to cause him serious uneasiness; but what if there should after all be reality in the threatened evil, and that Zoe, his own delicate, beautiful love, should, sanctioned by her father, have been compelled to submit to the odious familiarities of that low-bred, brutal adventurer?"

The mere passing thought was agony almost unbearable, nor could he find any alternative to his distress, save in the reflection, that had any such terrible danger been near at hand, Zoe could never have refused his prayer; but would, in spite of her father's prohibition and her dead mother's wishes, have claimed the protection of one who was both able and willing to save her.

Moved by these conflicting thoughts, Seymour wrote a letter to her, whom, once more, in his heart's deep anxiety for her safety, he called his "own." It was a letter breathing only love and tenderness — no word of reproach did it contain, but many a prayer that she would see him, and, seeing him, would unite her fate with his for ever.

This letter he despatched by post to New Orleans,

and waited, with feverish anxiety, for the answer — waited till his best hope was that the letter had not reached its destination, and then, when that hope grew fainter, half in pride, and half in fear, he wrote again.

Still no answer — not a word — nor could he take to himself the gloomy comfort that Zoe was ill or absent, for he had met a coloured man, the husband of one of the professional hair-dressers, who, in the city, as is the custom of the place, are in the habit of arranging the glossy tresses of the creole ladies. This man, who was a helper in a livery stable, had come upon his master's business to Pontchartrain, and being questioned by Mr. Seymour, had told him, that he had on the day before, seen Miss Gordon mounted upon Sultan in the green ride outside the town. So Seymour was easy on the score of Zoe's health; but with that doubtful consolation, all his angry pride welled up again more furiously than before, and, cursing in his heart all womenkind — their fickleness — avarice, and their coldheartedness, he, without an hour's delay, left Pontchartrain, and took passage in a steamboat going up the Mississippi.

It was his intention to remain for awhile on the plantation of some old family friends — Latour, by name — whose estate lay about two hundred and fifty miles above the city. There he could enjoy the peace and quiet which he fancied that he longed for, and there he could be certain of kindness and sympathy, for Mrs. Latour was a true friend in trouble, full of

all womanly tenderness, gentle, good, and Christian-like. A Northern by birth, she had married a rich Louisianian planter, and had ever since, both from a sense of duty and inclination, lived almost entirely on her husband's sugar plantation, where she occupied herself in all the duties befitting a true wife and mother. Her children, two little girls of ten and twelve years of age, were at school in New York, so that the family of whom Charles Seymour was about for a few days to form a part, consisted only of the master and mistress of the house, both of whom had, in his early boyhood, shown him many a now well-remembered kindness.

On disembarking at the wooding station, which was at about six miles' distance from Mr. Latour's house, a loafing white man, who was hanging about the quay, with no ostensible object, was despatched to give notice of Mr. Seymour's arrival at the plantation. Meanwhile, the latter strolled on in the direction pointed out to him, indulging in many a sad and regretful memory, while dismal forebodings of consequences arising in part from his own already repented-of rashness, crowded thick upon him. Beneath the shade of the arching trees, alone and conscience-stricken, there seemed no calamity so dreadful, but that it might fall upon his head and crush him utterly. Even Zoe's faithfulness and truth became to him at that dark hour as things problematical, and he arrived at last at such a pitch of misery and mistrust, that the distracting thought of her being able to enjoy herself

during his absence clung to him with painful pertinacity.

In the midst of his self-torture, a low carriage, driven by an elderly black coachman, met him on the grassy drive — a beautiful natural glade, which led towards Mr. Latour's house.

"Massa away wid de missus till de dinner time," was Cosmo's, the old Jehu's, announcement, as he stopped the vehicle and opened the door for the newcomer. "But dis chile show de place to massa," he added, with a patronizing smile, as he removed his hat from his conical-shaped woolly head.

Seymour, in the midst of his gloom, was, as they proceeded, amused by the pride shown by Cosmo in the various belongings of his master.

There was scarcely a fine old tree (and they passed many such on their way) to which he did not call the attention of his master's friend; and once, when a mottled deer sprang past them from a tangled thicket, the old fellow's enthusiasm was at its height.

"Dat massa's deer," he cried. "Massa he right good shot. Nebber miss shoot 'em — bring 'em down slick wid the rifle. Nuffin too hard for massa. Yaw, yaw, yaw!" and Cosmo's discordant laugh echoed through the woods.

An hour's drive brought them to a thick grove of ilexes and plantains, at the edge of which they came upon a collection of neatly-built negro huts, in front of, and appertaining to, every one of which was a small garden, apparently well stocked with vegetables.

"Dose de niggas quarters," Cosmo said, "and dat de doctor's house," pointing at the same time to a comfortable-looking dwelling which stood at about a hundred yards' distance from the huts. "He berry good man, dat doctor — by Gosh. Cleopatra Jane, you'll hab to be flogged, you lilly nigg. Keep from de ole hosse's heels, my piccaninny. She berry sharp, dat gal, sar. She my grandarter," added Cosmo, with a look of extreme exultation, as he pointed out Miss Cleopatra Jane (a young ebony damsel of some half-dozen years of age) to Seymour's especial notice.

Seymour could not call to mind that he had ever in the course of his travels beheld a healthier or more animated looking collection of the rising generation, nor could he well avoid drawing a comparison between those snug-looking cottages with their well-fenced garden-ground, their several chicken and piggery departments, and the wretched hovels in some parts of the Old World, in Ireland especially, whence at the approach of a stranger, there swarm out multitudes of more than half-naked beggars, imploring charity in the name of God for themselves, and the probably still more wretched-looking beings in the hovels. Certainly, the comparison was infinitely in favour of the "lower classes" in Louisiana, especially as regarded the little laughing, shouting, blackies, who, despite the remonstrances of Latour's antiquated Jehu, persisted in playing their childish antics in dangerous promixity to "de ole hosse's heels."

A long, low-roofed wooden building, built after the

usual type of plantation houses, stood about half-a-mile from the negro quarters, and on the carriage drawing up to the entrance door, Seymour perceived standing beneath the portico, the pleasant face of Mr. Latour, who greeted him with outstretched hand, and cordial expressions of satisfaction. Then followed Mrs. Latour's no less kindly welcome, and all the many well-known proofs of hospitality which are never wanting in plantation life.

To Seymour, from his long absence in Europe, the life to which he was introduced had almost the charm of novelty; and even in the midst of his cares and self-upbraidings, he was not sorry to have this excellent opportunity of strengthening his own opinion regarding the working of the "Peculiar Institution," and also of the capabilities of the negroes to enjoy and improve the blessings of freedom.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Latour were persons capable, from the enlargement of their minds, and the advantages of foreign travel, of forming valuable opinions as regarded the crisis which all thinking persons had long foreseen was near at hand; and Seymour on the very first evening of his visit, found himself listening with the deepest interest to sentiments which found an echo in his own breast, so full of Christian charity and far-sighted benevolence were those by whom he had been received in all the confidence of unsuspecting friendship.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"The land in which I lived, by a fell bane
Was withered up. Tyrants dwell side by side,
And stabled in our homes, until the chain
Stifled the captive's cry, and to abide
That blasting curse men had no shame."

"THEN," said Seymour, on the morning after his arrival, and while seated after their late breakfast with his host and hostess in their cool, pleasant room — "Then you think that for many of their undeniable sufferings and grievances the slaves have to thank the stirring Abolitionists of the North?"

"Certainly, for it is the Abolition cry which has for years been riveting the fetters of the negro, and keeping him in fact, as well as in name, a slave. Nothing has proved a greater curse to us than the presence of those numerous Northern speculators and debt-collectors who overrun the South. Frequently, representing themselves as the agents of Abolition Societies, they beguile the unsuspecting negroes by specious promises of liberty, to "run" from their masters; and having once inveigled them up the Red River to Arkansas or Texas, the mask is thrown off. The *soi-disant* liberator proclaims himself the master, and the unhappy captives are but too frequently subject to ill-usage fearful to reflect upon, and to personal cruelties which have obtained for the institution of Slavery an amount of odium greater even than it deserves. Whilst remembering these truths, it remains for us who deeply

feel the terrible weight of responsibility cast upon us by an institution which we had no hand in forming, and which was authorized and enforced by our own great lawgiver — it remains for us to do our best to render as light as possible an irremediable evil; and by attending in our own persons to the welfare of our slaves, endeavour to prevent the too-frequent, but, I trust, often unpremeditated, barbarities inflicted by hired overseers."

"Unpremeditated barbarity? That sounds like an anomaly," remarked Seymour.

"Sounds — but is not; for is it likely that even the most brutal of Yankee overseers — and the worst of those detestable individuals are generally Northern men — would be so insane as purposely to injure valuable property, and thereby waste invaluable time, which," he added, with a smile, "is, as we all know, money?"

"But there is the often-quoted danger of yielding to sudden passion —"

"Which finds, of course, its most satisfactory vent in giving pain," broke in Mrs. Latour; "nor," she added, "can I agree with Latour in calling the barbarity 'unpremeditated.' There must be a certain predisposition to torture in every one of those apparently chance outbreaks of violence; for men do not wreak their spite and anger upon inanimate objects, any more than they waste cutting words on the cold-hearted and insensible."

"And it thus having been logically proved by Theodora," said Mr. Latour, "that our overseers and drivers take actual pleasure in the sufferings of their species, it follows as a matter of course that one

human being should not be invested with the power of inflicting pain upon another."

"The cheerful look of the negro race on most of the plantations which I can remember to have seen," remarked Seymour, "would go far to disprove the general belief in the large amount of cruelty practised on the negroes."

"That, and many instances I could adduce of voluntary return to servitude, which, however, by the way, may be more owing to the far greater degree of misery (in the aggregate) endured in the so-called Free States by the equally-misnamed Free negro."

"I should like Mr. Seymour to have been present at Jemima's return from New York," said Mrs. Latour, who, Northern though she was, had strong pro-slavery tendencies, believing that, were good laws for the effectual protection of the negroes to be framed and carried out, their condition as the never-to-cess-out-of-the-land "lower orders" would be comparatively free from sin, care, and suffering. "Yes; I do wish you could have seen our children's nurse, Mr. Seymour, when, after we had presented her with her freedom, she returned of her own accord to the plantation, rather than endure the humiliations which I, as a Northern woman, am ashamed to say were inflicted on the faithful creature in the Free States."

"And came back, too, to as ill-tempered a husband as ever a good wife was saddled with," added Mr. Latour. "But I must do our friend Jemima the justice to add that she is paying off old scores now, and that Kit the carpenter is at last learning to 'behave himself.'"

"I always told you that Jemima would come back to us," said Mrs. Latour.

"Thereby showing your intimate knowledge of your countrymen's weak points," rejoined her husband. "Certainly anything much more dilapidated than poor Jemima looked after her wanderings, it has seldom been my lot to witness; and you must know, Seymour," he added, turning to his guest, "that the young woman in question had been for years rather a spoilt and over-indulged family servant; had, in short, although Theo and I tried to hide it from ourselves — been rather given to tyrannize over us in our weaker moments; and, especially in the matter of the children, had not unfrequently taken the law into her own hands."

"It was Latour's idea, sending her to New York with the children and her manumission papers," said Theodora; "*I* knew even when he said that she could make her fortune there as a lady's-maid, that Jemima would be miserable in the North, and forgetting all her domestic wrongs, would wish herself at home again before she had been away a week."

"But I suppose she was enchanted to go," said Seymour; "I mean enchanted with the idea of being free, and doing what she liked."

"Yes," Mrs. Latour answered, "certainly she seemed in the seventh heaven at first; but what I think delighted her most was the idea that she was not only safe from, but socially superior to, her tyrannical husband. It was amusing to see the looks of contempt which she threw at Kit, who in his turn grew daily more humble and crest-

fallen, while she sang to the children and all about the house from night till morning, like an uncaged bird."

"Nevertheless," said Mr. Latour, smiling; "her heart, my dear Theo, as I heard you once sensibly remark — though black, was in the right place; for as the time for her departure drew near, Jemima's countenance began to lengthen, her songs grew somewhat lugubrious in their tone, and we observed that tears sometimes chased one another down her polished cheeks.

"She cried dreadfully when she went away," continued Mrs. Latour. "Although she managed to get up a triumphant glance and sneer at the soon-to-be-deserted Kit, who stood wistfully gazing after the carriage which bore his affranchised helpmate from his sight."

"And how long," asked Seymour, "was it before she returned to her wifelike duties?"

"Well, it did not require much time to convince her that the words of 'Freedom' and of 'Mercy' for the blacks, spoken in the North, are, taken as a whole, sounds only — meaning nothing — and generated by party-spirit — with agitation for their object, cloaked by an hypocrisy which has not its equal in the history either of individuals or of nations."

"Jemima was absent altogether from the plantation exactly six months," said Mrs. Latour, answering more directly to Seymour's question, "and I confess that as the time wore on, I had begun to feel some alarm regarding the realization of my prophecy, when on one gloomy February day, nearly three months ago, I saw, approaching the house, while I was at work under the

verandah, no less a personage—for I must tell you that Jemima *was* a personage here—than our children's devoted nurse, she who had loved them as her own from infancy, and whose untiring care of them had earned for her the freedom which she had learnt to prize so little."

"And what account did she give of herself?"

"You shall hear. In the first place a more worn-out, miserable-looking appearance than she presented I have rarely seen. Her dress, torn and neglected, and the Madras handkerchief which used to be arranged so coquettishly on her head, put on awry with its long ends dangling all forlornly over her forehead. 'Why, Jemima,' I exclaimed, 'this can never be yourself! You poor, weak, wasted thing!' She took the hand I held out to her, and crying over it, covered it with kisses. It was a little time before she could repeat her story, which was a pitiful one, telling of oppression, insult, almost starvation, and of bitter mortifications for which her life, on this plantation, had ill prepared her."

"A pitiful tale, indeed," rejoined Latour; "for what with the snubbing she endured during her travels in the miserable places apportioned to the people of her colour, what with the constant harsh reminders that the keen Northern advocates for freedom had no idea of allowing a 'slovenly, unwholesome' nigger to come between the wind and their exclusiveness, poor Jemima appears to have had a bad time of it."

"I think she felt the cruelty of the exclusiveness you speak of in the churches most," said Mrs. Latour;

"for she had always been led to believe, that with the great Being who made the black man and the white, there was no distinction of persons. Here there were no churches made with hands, no temples of stone amongst the orange-trees and cane-brakes, but on the Sabbath-day it had been her well-appreciated privilege to listen to the words of Scripture read by a preacher of her own colour, under the open canopy of heaven. There the united voices of that simple-hearted congregation rose to the throne of Him who looks with like favour upon the bondsman and the free; and there she saw no scoffers near her, none to despise and loathe the coloured people, albeit they dwell in the house of bondage.

"She must have found it very different in the cold, bitter North," said Latour, "where even the small, white 'piccaninnies,' as Jemima calls them (the sight of whom reminded her of home, and of her easy Southern service) — even they, like autocratic young Republicans as they were, appeared to have heaped their small quota of insult on the coloured nurse. 'Why now, you wouldn't tink it, sar,' the poor thing said, 'but when I tried to speak to one of the pretty lily white missies in dere silks and muslins, dey call me tinkin' black woman, and turned away from me like dat.'"

"*Dat* being," added Mrs. Latour, laughing, "a kind of scornful jerk of her body, intended to represent the *ne plus ultra* of haughtiness and arrogance, as exemplified in the tossed-up heads and highly-elevated noses of the sensitive young Northern ladies."

"And how about Kit, the carpenter?" asked Sey-

mour, after a pause. "I hope the absence of his wife brought him to his senses, and that Jemima is no longer *une femme incomprise* in her log cabin."

"It did him all the good in the world, that six months of widowhood," replied Latour; "for I am not one of those who wink at, or indeed (as most planters do) encourage polygamy amongst the negroes. I have had more than one quarrel with my neighbours, because I would not allow visits from — I mean that — well, these are not subjects for a lady's ears, only when the object of so many is to increase their slave stock, strict morality is somewhat at a discount."

"And in the face of such consequences as these, men are found who can dare to call slavery a Divine institution!" exclaimed Seymour, indignantly.

"Well, well!" rejoined Latour, "the system has its advantages, as I think I shall be able to prove to you; in the meantime, Jemima reaps the advantage of the peculiar institution in the amended conduct of her husband, whose 'rule' is now only used for the legitimate purposes of his trade, and who, in my opinion, is likely to become a far better husband than if the ceremony of holding to bail had been employed for his reformation, or if six months of the hardening process of prison life had rendered his improvement more than problematical."

Mr. Latour rose as he spoke, and proposing to his guest a saunter in the woods till dinner time, the two friends left the house together, with the intention of visiting the negro quarters, and pursuing a conversation which possessed deep interest for both Seymour and his host.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"From billow, and mountain, and exhalation,
The sunlight is darted through vapour and blast;
From spirit to spirit, from nation to nation,
From city to hamlet, thy dawning is cast —
And tyrants and slaves are like shadows of night
In the van of the morning light."

"YES — I have but fifty of them, nor do I intend to increase their number; it is as many as Theodora and I can attend to, and do our duty by, and more would entail the necessity of employing that worst of tyrants and grievances called by the revolting name of 'driver.'"

They were strolling through the negro quarters, stopping occasionally to speak to some one or other of the plantation "hands," who, their dinner being over, but not the hour allowed for its enjoyment, were basking in the hot sun outside the cabin doors, playing with their children, or doing a "turn" of work for themselves in their much-prized vegetable gardens.

"I give them Saturday and Sunday for themselves," said Mr. Latour, "paying them for their work if they choose to act as hired labourers for the day; and, I can assure you, that the amount of work they get through during the short season, when they imagine themselves to be free and independent, and while toiling for themselves and families, is perfectly marvellous."

"And if this be so apparent even on a plantation

such as yours, where I should imagine the negroes never work unwillingly, the difference must be still more remarkable on estates where labour and sorrow are for six days in the week synonymous terms."

"That by no means follows," answered Latour, "for evil feelings of every kind increase mightily, though one of them only may be worked upon, and a long-continued course of degrading and irritating treatment, with the hourly sight, although it may be rarely used, of the whip in the overseer's hands, are sufficient causes in themselves to deaden every healthy aspiration, and reduce the negro to the mere machine, which many profess to consider as his natural vocation."

"The entire absence of anything which the law permits them to call their own, must have," said Seymour, "a deplorable effect on the minds and energies of the negroes."

"True; for, in fact, they can claim no legal descendants for whom their exertions would ensure profit and advantage. They possess nothing of domestic joys but the caresses of their wives and children, and even they belong of right to the mercenary owner, who may, without preparation or a word of warning given, make merchandise of those valued treasures."

"Then," said Seymour, musingly, "it would really appear, that all things considered, the manumission of the slaves would be advantageous alike to the white race and the black?"

"Such is my opinion: but it should be liberty not given hastily, and certainly not without many restrictions,

necessary not only for the well-being of the coloured people, but also for that of the planters themselves."

"And in what would those precautions consist?"

"In the first place, the slaves should work out their freedom, in order (for one reason) to render them capable of appreciating the blessing of liberty — and then, I would have the ancient laws enforced, which compel a coloured man who is a loafer and a vagabond, to work, under penalty of being banished from the territory in which he is abiding."

"But how, without the whip, would you make the negroes work with any degree of remunerative profit?"

"By giving them task-work, and withholding their pay in case of failing in their portion of the agreement. Believe me that the blacks are as qualified as any people in the world to appreciate the value of money, and that for their families — families from whom they no longer lived in daily dread of forcible separation, they are as capable of making meritorious efforts as the sharpest-witted white man who ever devoted his time and talents to a high and useful purpose."

"Then you are not of those," asked Seymour, "who consider the black race as one separate and apart, and destined by the Creator to remain as long as the world lasts, a 'people' scarcely to be recognized as such by civilized nations — but viewed as Pariahs — a link almost — for so it seems to me that they are deemed by many — between the human being and the brute creation?"

"I can hardly believe," answered Latour, "that you can put that question seriously after seeing such proofs of intelligence in the negro race, as I have already pointed out to you, especially in the children whom Mrs. Latour has educated as carefully, and with as good results, as though they were our own."

"But how have you evaded the law in that matter? I have an idea that it is very strict as regards the non-instruction of the slaves."

"Strict enough. But," he added, with a smile, "the children on our plantation are all self-taught. Ask them where they gained their knowledge, and the answer will invariably be, 'I taught myself.' A white lie which, I trust, will be recorded against both them and us, as such, in the book of God's remembrance." And with regard to what you say of the natural mental inferiority of the Africans, I am not, of course, prepared to assert that the aggregate of intelligence is as great as in the white man. Intellectual qualities are, as we all know, at their *acmé* in the temperate regions of the globe, and in the extremes of heat and cold the mental faculties are decidedly inferior."

"There is one thing, however," rejoined Seymour, "which gives the lie to the often-expressed opinion, namely — that the black race is one distinct and apart from the rest of humanity, and that argument is that nature, so strict in keeping from admixture the various species, both of the animal and vegetable world, has not interfered as regards the consequences of intercourse between the white race and the black."

"True, and the rapid improvement which generally occurs, even in the first cross between the black and white races, an improvement — let me say — in each, proves that nature does not set her face against this admixture of the races. In my opinion it is their condition as *slaves* which causes them to be looked on in the North with such unchristianlike loathing and contempt, and that were freedom to be declared by the South —"

"Where would you all be?" broke in Seymour abruptly. "You would be all ruined, I imagine — you planters — for besides the want of labour which, notwithstanding all you say, you might, I think, greatly suffer from, there would be those four millions of coloured people upon your hands, whom —"

"It would be too barbarous to throw, either upon their own poor mental resources, or on the boasted charity of the Northern Abolitionists. No, my dear Seymour, aware as I am of what, in reality, that charity consists, it will be long, indeed, before I shall be an advocate for any measure likely to deliver up the negro to the so-called mercies of the North." A short life, and a miserable one is, indeed, that which awaits the emancipated negro in the Free States, where in a climate every way uncongenial to their nature and their habits, they crowd the hospitals for the blind, the idiot, and the insane; leading a precarious existence of crime and wretchedness in the pestilential hovels of crowded cities, and filling the prisons and the graveyards with a rapidity and a profusion actually startling to reflect upon."

"Then you think that emancipation, in order to be beneficial, ought to be a work of time?"

"The answer to your question is so self-evident, that I hardly think it necessary to answer in the affirmative. Would to God that the first move in the great approaching change had been already made; and then, when the cloud, which has so long been gathering, shall break over our heads, how great would be our triumph, could we present ourselves with cleansed hands before the tribunal of the world, and say — 'We have commenced the glorious work — the work of Freedom — and we have done it of our own unaided will, without either coercion or interference.'"

"There is little prospect, I fear, of such a desirable event," began Seymour.

"Little indeed! For the idea is but as a dream of the few, many as are those who feel and lament the evil and the shame. And it is an evil and a shame to call ourselves free when we hold millions of blacks in bondage, and millions more of our own colour in ignorance and degradation, to further our own selfish ends. The greatest nation on the face of the earth might, in my opinion, be a well governed Southern republic; for this land of ours contains, as our Northern enemies well know, all the necessary elements for glory and prosperity."

"But is it possible that white men can labour in the plantations, especially in the rice-grounds, where the life of the negro rarely reaches beyond forty years, and —"

"More shame to us for employing human beings in a work so murderous!" burst in Latour, passionately. "But I have already explained how we might ensure to ourselves a certain amount of labour at the hands of the freed negroes. And what if some of our at present cultivated lands, where the heat is greatest, should be destined to lie fallow? — why, there is virgin soil enough in the healthier districts — in Virginia, where scarcely more than a fourth has ever been turned up — to pay a hundredfold for the apparent sacrifice.

"Soil which would be invaluable, as I have heard," said Seymour, "for the cultivation of figs, olives, vines, and other productions 'too numerous to mention.' But still, I repeat, what would become of the millions let loose upon society?"

"I can hardly call it 'letting loose,' if the millions were educated human beings, prepared by industry for the emergencies of life, and capable of understanding the advantages of willing labour. The demand for work would not be lessened, but increased — a change of things which I for one would decidedly advocate — the amalgamation of the races by legal ties would insensibly decrease the numbers of those marked by the obnoxious colour, and —"

"The Yankee overseers would find their mission at an end."

"A very profitable mission, too, they have often found it; for it is frightfully easy to elude the laws which require plenty of food, and animal food too,

for the negroes, while the overseers put the savings in their own pockets."

"And then," rejoined Seymour, "it is so completely in the brute's interest to overwork the poor wretches; for, as I overheard a man say in the boat coming up, 'a real devil of an overseer can get any wages he'd ask.'"

"Exactly; for his own future prospects depend entirely on the quantity of cotton he is able to make up for the market: and it is the knowledge of this and other facts which has not only led us to limit the number of our dependants, but has confirmed us in the resolution of looking to their well-being with our own eyes."

"And in the event of a civil war, would you have no fear of the negroes rising against their owners?"

"None whatever, either on my estate or on any other; the which, should my opinion be borne out by future facts, will go far to prove not only the general good usage of the coloured race in the South, but that it is the very contrary treatment which they expect from a change of masters. However, even as I before said, there is little or no hope of *our* taking the first step in this all-important matter; and the nations of Europe, who, were we cleansed from this great stain, might sympathize with and assist us in the coming struggle, will only act the part of spectators in the most desolating and vengeful war that ever laid waste a hitherto prosperous and thriving country."

They had, whilst conversing thus, walked more than a mile into the interior of the forest, and had now, on their return towards the house, again come into the midst of the negroes' cabins. The dinner-hour had long been over, and only an old woman and several tumbling, shining, jet-black piccaninnies of various ages were visible at the doors. There were no starving, ill-used, beaten children amidst that laughing little crew — no young faces on which the blighting effects of fear, of evil companionship, and of early privation had set their seal; for all had been nourished in health and cared for in sickness, whilst crime and misery were things unknown on an estate where difference of colour did not diminish the claim for sympathy and tenderness, and where the kindly lady, the mistress of those simple-hearted Africans, was wont

“To read to them at eventide

Of One who came to save;

To cast the captive's chains aside,

And liberate the slave.”

On the day following that on which Seymour and his host had discussed so much at length the vexed question of slavery, a letter, all-important to the former, by reason of the news which it contained, was placed in his hands.

In it Charles Seymour was informed by the friend with whom he was in the habit of corresponding, of Zoe Gordon's marriage, and her departure from New Orleans. Prepared as he ought in some degree to have been, for this fatal intelligence, the news came

upon him, as the saying is, like a thunderbolt, and his resolution was immediately formed, in despite of the arguments and entreaties of his more reasoning friends, to take his passage without loss of time, up the Mississippi, with the extremely faint expectation of in some way or other, falling in with the unhappy girl, whose sacrifice he had, as he told himself, assisted to consummate.

What his intentions were, in the event of his meeting with Zoe, he did not inquire into, but movement of some kind had become, as it seemed, almost necessary to his existence, and once on the bosom of the giant river, and stemming its strong current, his mind could think more consistently, though not more calmly, of the future fate of her he loved.

We have already seen how, in the darkness and the storm, the race between the monster boats was run, and how in the silence of that soft May night, the "Magnolia," with Charles Seymour sleeping tranquilly on board, passed, and gave no sign before the eyes of the lonely girl, whom, but for a moment to press within his arms, Charles Seymour would have given, with heartfelt gratitude, years of the young life before him.

But it was not to be, and so the sight of his pale and thoughtful face upon the "Magnolia's" deck was the last vision that for many a day the Octaroon could summon to her memory of the man whose love was still the closest tie which bound her to a life of trial.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"A life of honour and of worth
Has no eternity on earth, —
'Tis but a name;
And yet its glory far exceeds
That base and sensual life which leads
To want and shame."

FROM the time that Zoe stepped on board the —— till her arrival in Philadelphia she met with no adventures worthy to be recorded. A sad journey and a weariful was it, but while on the river she ran no danger of discovery, and later, having money at her disposal, and moreover having gained some experience of the difficulties which were likely to beset her, she took her measures accordingly, and in due time arrived without let or hindrance in the Quaker city.

To say that throughout her lengthened pilgrimage, Zoe's thoughts were not almost incessantly fixed on the lover of whom she had caught so transient a glimpse, would be to give her credit for an amount of perfection as rare as it would probably be uninteresting. The reflection that she was following on his track was her only comfort and support during those long days of loneliness and trouble. But for that, she would hardly have found courage to look hopefully to the future. Nor, had not the image of the absent one supported her under her trials, would the long letter ever have been penned to Pauline, which revealed to that sympathizing friend all the varied misfortunes which since she had despatched her last letter from New Orleans, had befallen the unfortunate Octaroon.

The very act of writing that letter was of infinite service to her who had so long been shut out from communion with one of her own sex who was capable of entering into her sorrows. It seemed to take her back to the days when she was regarded as an equal by those gently bred ones, and with every word she penned, the broad gulf narrowed between her and them. It was a long letter, a little history in itself, and it took many days to finish, so that Zoe had arrived at the end of her river voyage almost before the despatch for Pennevic was signed and sealed.

On the arrival of the train at Philadelphia, Zoe, who had felt more and more alarmed at the step she was about to take, the nearer the cars approached the city, desired the driver of the hackney-carriage she had engaged to take her to Mr. Burns' house in Fifth Avenue.

On her way she asked herself, and that for the twentieth time, what right she had to suppose that her father's uncle would befriend her in this her great emergency, or would look upon her in any degree in the light of a relation. It was true that she had often heard her mother speak of Mr. Burns as of one endowed in no common degree with the gifts of benevolence and Christian charity, and this being the case there was comfort for her; inasmuch as she at least was guiltless of wrong-doing, and the aged philanthropist was not one, as she felt well assured, to visit the sins of the fathers on the children. But repeat these truths as often as she would, still Zoe's heart beat faster than was its wont when the driver, having arrived at the

house indicated, raised the heavy knocker of the door, and inquired if the master of the house was at home.

A coloured footman, in a sober brown livery, answered the question in the affirmative, and Zoe, after giving her name to the attendant, followed him into a small dining-room on the basement story, in which Mr. Burns (for the clock in the hall had just struck the hour of nine) was commencing the last solitary meal of which he would that day partake. He pushed up his spectacles from an exceedingly bald head when the name of Gordon was announced, and a tall figure dressed in flowing feminine garments glided with the graceful walk, peculiar to the creoles, towards him.

"Miss Gordon — Zoe Gordon," he said, rising courteously from his chair, and extending a thin, wrinkled hand towards her — for Mr. Burns was turned of eighty, and, though possessed of all his faculties, betrayed many of the outward attributes of age. "I did not expect you, my dear, but I knew your mother well, and am proud to see her daughter under my roof."

Zoe was almost moved to tears of gratitude by a reception so much warmer than she had any right to expect or hope for; but her common sense told her that this was neither a time nor place for any over-indulgence in the softer emotions, and she therefore restricted herself to saying, while she pressed the old man's hands in her small delicate palms, —

"How kind you are, sir. And how glad I am that you remember my mother, and the name I bear. It makes me feel less ashamed of coming uninvited to

your house, and of telling you all my shameful story, while I beg you to protect and save me."

The tears which she could no longer restrain, fell upon the hands she held, but they were softened by the kind, paternal words which answered to her almost passionate appeal.

"My dear," said Mr. Burns, "I was about to ask after your father, and to inquire whether he came to the North with you, but what you say inclines me to think that I shall have the pleasure of but one guest this time. Say—is it so?" he asked, patting the little hand he held affectionately.

It needed but this encouragement from the benevolent old man who had been her mother's friend, to draw from Zoe all her piteous story. And it was a relief to her when all was told, and an exceeding comfort in her trial that she could say to her own heart, "I have no guilt with which to reproach myself—no wilful sin to lay at the feet of this kind old man, who has received me as though I were his child, and taken the poor wanderer (journeying through a country where the hands of all men are against her) beneath the shelter of his roof."

That night — the first for many a long and weary one — Zoe obtained the refreshment of untroubled slumber, and when she descended from her chamber to meet her kind new friend at breakfast, a hopeful light shone in the young girl's eyes, which reminded Mr. Burns — at least he told her so — of Clarice. And so they sat and talked together pleasantly, a "pair of friends" already; although she who looked so fresh and beautiful "was young," "and *he* was eighty-two."

CHAPTER XXXV.

"Good gifts in fortune's hands are found,
Her swift revolving wheel turns round,
And they are gone!
No rest the inconstant goddess knows,
But changing, and without repose
Still hurries on."

AND now, having conducted my heroine to a safe, though temporary anchorage, where, as in a tranquil harbour, she might forget for awhile the storms and perils of the past, we will return for a short space to the two unscrupulous conspirators (dealers in human flesh and blood, for it is as well to call them by their true names), whose rage and consternation, when they were made aware of Zoe's flight, pass the power of words to describe.

For Morse to take any active steps for her recovery was, in the present state of his health, out of the question; and equally impossible was it for his confederate in crime to bestir himself openly in the pursuit of the fugitive. But, although temporarily prevented from taking active measures for the re-possession of the Octaroon, there yet remained to them the gratification — and a solid one it promised to be — of visiting upon the father the trickery, as they termed it, of the child; and of reducing — through the foreclosing of the mortgage, and the betrayal of his well-

kept secrets, the hitherto respected Mr. Jaspar Gordon to poverty and disgrace.

This plan of vengeance was decided upon between the two uncompromising villains within an hour of the time (and it was then four o'clock in the evening of the day following her escape), when, almost by an accident, that escape became known to the hitherto sleeping-partner in this joint-stock bank of iniquity. He had come into the ladies' saloon after breakfast (at which, as I need not say, Zoe had failed to make her appearance), with a message from that young lady's husband, to the effect that she would immediately betake herself to Mr. John Link Morse's cabin. He tapped unceremoniously enough at the door of Zoe's state-room, and receiving no answer to his summons, he opened the door, and looked in.

Somewhat surprised was he to find the small apartment tenantless — surprised, but not alarmed at first, for the chances were that Zoe, as her custom was, had on that spring morning betaken herself to the hurricane-deck, there to enjoy the genial breezes wafted towards her from the distant Western prairies.

Impressed with this conviction, Braddell hurried to the upper deck in search of the treasure, one-half of which, on condition of undertaking the part of *seller*, he deemed himself entitled to call his own. He mounted the steep "ladder" with a rapid, business step — his coat-tails lifted by the breeze, and his long straight hair — to all appearance guiltless of brush or comb — streaming over his greasy coat collar.

He looked around him to the right and to the left, but saw no trace of her he sought for. The survey was soon made, and then — the alarm given — every portion of the boat was searched and re-searched, but in vain.

The first impression caused by Zoe's disappearance was, that she had sought refuge from her sorrows beneath the waves of the greedy, all-devouring river. This, I say, was the first idea prevalent on board; but, on a more careful investigation of the state-room which she had occupied, it became evident that, had death been the object of the absent one, she would have taken with her fewer articles necessary for the use and comfort of the living.

Zoe's purse and watch, with the few ornaments of value she could call her own, were no longer to be found amongst her possessions; and thence it followed (in the opinion of everyone on board) that Mrs. Link Morse had left the steamboat and her husband's protection surreptitiously and alone.

Having arrived at this conclusion, the parties most interested in the event held immediate and private conference together. Their interview resulting, as I have said, in the decision that Jaspar Gordon's fate should no longer, in so far as they were concerned, remain in the balance between competence and ruin.

An hour later, and a steamer going down-river to New Orleans was hailed, and Braddell, with his very limited amount of "plunder" (especially limited, inasmuch as such plunder had reference to the articles of

what are commonly known as body linen), transferred himself to the good boat "Sultana," bound to the Crescent City.

It is not necessary to follow step by step the man who, in conjunction with Morse, was interested in the ruin of the Southern planter; nor need we dwell upon the manner in which the blow, so long expected, and so carefully staved off, fell at last with relentless violence upon the head of Zoe's father.

It is sufficient to say, that the property which had belonged to his family for generations past and gone, passed into the hands of the Northern slave-dealers. Nothing — no — not even a rood of land or square foot of brick and mortar remained to the utterly impoverished man; his human chattels — a goodly show of men, women, and children, were delivered over to the ownership of others; and a week only after the unexpected return of Braddell to the city, Jaspar Gordon sat in a small garret-like room in the St. Louis Hotel, and with a heart full of bitterness and self-upbraidings, indited — so entirely had his misfortunes taken the pride from out his breast — a letter, asking in urgent terms of his uncle at Philadelphia, a small sum of money with which to procure himself the necessities of life.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"I have all prepared
For instant flight; I can escape even now,
So I take fleet occasion by the hair."

"I AM quite sure that it was he I saw; and therefore, my dear young lady, the sooner you leave this house and the good city of Philadelphia behind you, the better."

The words were uttered by Dr. Corsten, during a morning visit which he paid to his old friend, Mr. Burns, two days only after Zoe's arrival in Chesnut Street.

Aroused from the momentary feeling of security in which she had begun to indulge, Zoe had turned very pale on the first mention of Morse's name; and she now sat, flushed and feverish, waiting for advice from her well-tried friends, and with a wretched consciousness in her breast that her short season of rest was over, and that, with a heart for every fate, she must soon again be up and doing.

Mr. Burns, whose perceptions were slightly blunted by age, and who had not as yet entirely realized the full amount of the threatened evil, looked from one to another of his guests with a puzzled expression upon his venerable face, while he hastened to say — the moment an opportunity arrived for putting in his word

— that he earnestly trusted Zoe would not leave him, but would remain to solace an old man in his loneliness, and cast a lingering ray of sunshine on his home. All this in other words was said and urged by Gordon's uncle; but when the exceeding danger of Zoe's position was explained by Dr. Corsten, the philanthropist saw the matter in its true light, and ceased to press his hospitable invitation.

"You see," the doctor said, "that the fellow has undoubtedly got a clue, or he would never have arrived, as I just now saw him do, bag and baggage, at Girard's. All that now remains," he added, addressing the harassed girl, "is to consult as to what you had better do to avoid a pursuit which I foresee will be both hot and persevering; and my opinion is that you couldn't do better than depart at once for New York."

"New York!" exclaimed Zoe, in dismay. "That great bewildering city in which I do not possess even an acquaintance!"

"So much the better," responded the doctor, coolly; "for there will be the less danger of your being recognized; and if you will consent to the plan which I have chalked out for you, I think that I can ensure you, for a time at least, from any chance that this pretended husband of yours may discover your hiding-place."

"I will go anywhere — I will do anything," began Zoe, eagerly.

"Then," said Dr. Corsten, "with a kind smile of encouragement, "my first order is that you retire for

a short time to your own room, whilst Mr. Burns and I consult about this notable project of mine. You will require all your courage, all your presence of mind, in order to meet and overcome the difficulties which lie before you; and," added he, as he opened the door for the young girl's egress, bowing at the same time with Old-World courtesy over the hand he held, "may He who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb be near to you in every trial, and assist you with the strength which He alone can give."

An excellent and a truly religious man was Dr. Corsten; and Mr. Burns — to whom, as to all who knew him, the straightforward uprightness of the physician's character was no secret — entered without a dissentient opinion into the plan which the latter suggested as the one most calculated to be advantageous to the fugitive. This plan was no other than that Zoe should, at the doctor's recommendation, enter, in the capacity of governess to his children, the family of a rich New York merchant, with whom the physician was bound by the ties of relationship.

"Most worthy people are the Thornfields," he said, after explaining to Mr. Burns that he had already been requested by them to inquire in the South for a lady capable of instructing three little girls in the French language, as well as in other accomplishments. "Most worthy, true-hearted people; and, as I have every reason to believe, not to be classed amongst the illiberal ones, who would object to a highly-educated, charming, and intellectual lady, because, forsooth — but I

need not go over the old, old story — I am convinced that, as far as the Thornfields are concerned, our young friend need fear neither mortification nor slights; and as Mrs. Thornfield is an invalid, who resides habitually at her villa on the banks of the Hudson, a few miles from the city, there could not be found a more desirable or safer place of refuge."

In this opinion, Mr. Burns, as I have already said, entirely agreed; and it being of the utmost importance that Zoe's stay in Philadelphia should be as short as possible, an hour had scarcely elapsed before she was well on her way to New York, furnished with a letter from Dr. Corsten to the lady in whose house she hoped to find a shelter and a home.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"You come here

To take from me the only thing I have —
My honour.

Oh, sir! such love

That's seeks to harm me, cannot be true love,
Indeed it cannot."

FIVE months had passed, and Zoe was still an inmate — a valued and trusted one — of Mr. Thornfield's pretty villa, on the banks of the "lordly Hudson." Very calm appeared to be her outward life, and, as yet, not a shadow of anxiety concerning her husband's dreaded search had ruffled the quiet current of her life.

Her time was, happily for herself, fully occupied in the tuition of her pupils. Into the work Zoe had, following the dictates of her eager impulsive nature, thrown all her energies; and by her manifest success, added to the affection of those around her, she reaped her due reward.

Very seldom was the quiet routine of the young girl's life varied by accidental gaieties, or by the arrival of guests at the villa; for, as Dr. Corsten had truly said, Mrs. Thornfield was an invalid, and, moreover, she had from the first encouraged the governess, who was known at Hemlock Mount as Mademoiselle Ferrand, to seclude herself in her own apartment when any visitors were expected at the villa. Was she aware of the great reason for secrecy, which, in Zoe's case, existed? And had the worthy doctor, as was perhaps his wisest and most independent course, revealed the truth to the matronly invalid, who, know-

ing well the narrow-minded prejudices of her country, guarded her young inmate from reproach and insult by keeping her, as much as lay in her power, removed from the curious gaze of men?

But kind-hearted and considerate as was the mother of the little girls, who had already learned to regard "Mademoiselle" as their best friend, as well as their indulgent instructress — an evil, not in any degree anticipated by Mrs. Thornfield, was looming over Zoe in the peaceful dwelling of Hemlock Mount.

The lady of the house had a brother — an officer he was in the army — who had been educated at West Point, and had "seen the world," both in the Southern and Northern States. He entertained the strict ideas of morality as regarded married life, for which his country is remarkable, nor was he by any means loose in his notions of the respect due to maiden purity and honour. Not for worlds would Captain Fenwick have uttered a word bordering on insult to a "young person" domiciled beneath his mother's roof were she the humblest, lowliest, *white* woman who ever gave her toil for board and shelter. But the moment that the soldier's eyes rested on the clear, colourless cheek of the Octaroon, and marked the sleepy, long-shaped eyes fringed by their sweeping lashes — from that moment, I repeat, a suspicion, which, however, he carefully kept to himself, darted across his mind that negro blood, though in its minutest particles, ran in the blue veins of his little nieces' governess.

From the hour when Captain Fenwick made that

notable discovery, there was no longer peace at Hemlock Mount for Zoe. Persecuted at every moment by attentions which no reserve on her part was able to suppress, she soon found herself almost a prisoner in her own room, where alone she could hope to find a refuge from the young officer's insulting offers and protestations. For several weeks she chafed beneath a mortification which she was powerless to put an end to; and at last, wearied, indignant, and regretful (for she was loth to leave the home where she trusted she had found a refuge), Zoe resolved on revealing all to Mrs. Thornfield, and entreating her advice and protection.

It was impossible for Fenwick's sister to note, without a full sense of its great danger, the almost splendid beauty of the Octaroon, when, her dark eyes flashing, and her breast heaving with passion, she poured out her wrongs in a quick stream of angry words. Mrs. Thornfield could well understand (good woman and habitual invalid although she was) that such attractions might well have power to deaden her brother's sense of what is due to a pure, virtuous maiden—a maiden even protected although she was by the sanctity of his sister's home, and by the mute evidence of her own stainless honour.

A very short time allowed for reflection, convinced the mistress of Henlock Mount that Zoe would be safer and happier elsewhere, than in a house where she was exposed to the persecutions of one whose wife she could never hope to become, and whose future prospects might be blighted by the insane passion which had taken possession of him. It was hard to part with Mademoiselle

Ferrand—hard to separate the children from the young teacher whom they loved as a companion, and trusted as a friend; but Mrs. Thornfield, who was in her way a woman of decision, did not hesitate in the course she had to pursue, and at once informed Zoe that her better course would be to seek a home elsewhere.

“And, my dear,” she said, when the proposition had been made, and tearfully assented to, “you need not fear but what we shall be able very soon to procure you an eligible situation. Indeed, I do not think I can go far wrong in saying that I have already one in my eye for you. We have two friends — sisters — superior women, who keep school in University Square, and not more than a week ago the youngest, Miss Medora Selwood, told me that they were on the lookout for a French instructress; and if the situation is not yet filled up, I reckon that it would suit you beautifully. You would have a good time with the Selwoods, who are of high family, and very refined in their manners.”

Zoe listened and assented. It was all one to her where and with whom she took up her abode, provided she could hope to be secure from discovery by her enemies. Fortunately for her, the eligible situation was still available when applied for by Mrs. Thornfield; and it was arranged that in a few days Zoe and her small possessions should be transferred to a grand house in University Square, where the “well-born” Misses Selwood had for several years been at the head of a large and thriving seminary for the rising female generation of New York and its vicinity.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“And I, still gazing on that glorious child,
Ev’n as those thoughts flash’d ov’r her: — ‘Zoe, sweet,
Well, with the world art thou unreconciled?
Never will peace and human nature meet,
Till free and equal man and woman greet
Domestic peace; and ere this power can make
In human hearts its calm and holy seat,
This Slavery must be broken.’”

A FEW days spent in the Misses Selwood’s well-conducted establishment, and Zoe was again beginning to grow accustomed to her daily routine of duty — accustomed to its *routine*, but with little or no hope of finding either in the daily tasks, or in the tranquil seclusion of her life, some consolation for the never-to-be-forgotten trials of the past.

For curious looks were fixed upon her in that mimic world where nearly fourscore of Eve’s investigating daughters had their quick eyes ever on the watch — the elder ones with jealousy of so rare a beauty, and the younger (as is so often the case in the bad, actual world) “following suit,” with due regard to the opinions, however little estimable they might be, of those who chanced to be their superiors in any of the social distinctions of life.

The curiosity, coarsely, and often even offensively displayed, of which our hapless heroine could not fail

to see that she was the object, would have troubled but little her still hopeful spirit, had she not discovered in the meaning glances round her, signs of the gathering thunder-clouds. For they were far from friendly those young curious faces, on which she read suspicious looks — hard and unwomanly — looks which said plainly to the lonely-hearted girl, that even there, surrounded only by those of her own gentler sex, the “brand” upon her brow forbade that she should find a friend.

With patient fortitude she bore her Cross, and only told her griefs — poor desolate child — to God. But there were moments when she almost sank beneath the burthen which, without the blessed strengthening medicine, Hope, was well-nigh all too heavy for endurance — then the crushed spirit cowered to the ground, and the bruised reed raised up no more its drooping head in feeble protest against the storm that raged against it.

It must not be supposed that during the long months which it has taken so short a time to tell of, the Octaroon had neglected to take measures for the restoration of the gift of Freedom which she had lost in a manner so unexpected, and unaccountable. No sooner had she arrived at Philadelphia than she wrote to her father a true and detailed account of all that had taken place on board the “John C. Calhoun” — concluding with an urgent prayer that he would, the moment he received her letter, restore to her the “unspeakable gift” of which she had been so mysteri-

ously deprived, and without which, life, as she expressed it, would be unendurable.

She despatched her letter, and waited with what impatience the reader will readily imagine — for the reply. It was long in coming — so long that Zoe had left the protection of Mr. Burns for her, “situation,” in New York before the answer came which told her that her request was vain!

It was a hard task to tell her so — a hard one even for the selfish man by whose reckless conduct her misery had been caused, to confess to his hapless child, that the sale of all that he possessed had not by any means sufficed to satisfy his creditors; and that for that cause, added to technical law reasons, unnecessary to explain, he no longer boasted the power of restoring to his child the blessing that man has taken from the African — the one, great inestimable blessing, which God and nature have bestowed on all alike.

At first she could not bring herself to understand the unlooked-for, and overwhelming fiat — but puzzle over it as she would — the fiat was still there, bare, black, and indisputable, that in the South — the country to which she owed her birth — she was a *slave*, liable to be bartered for her worth in dollars — and prostituted — it is an ugly and a shameful word — to the basest of base purposes, at the will and pleasure of the man whom the law acknowledged as her owner.

It may seem strange to the reader — especially,

when taking into consideration, that every mail from Europe, brought pressing letters from Pauline de Rouvray, entreating Zoe to remember that she had a home awaiting her in France, that the friendless girl should never have entertained the idea of abandoning the land in which she had endured so much sorrow, and cruel persecution for a peaceful shelter amongst hearts whose love had never failed her.

That this should have been, must, we repeat, seem strange at first, but let those who peruse these pages remember that Zoe had ties, the strongest which the young and passionate can form, to bind her to the Western hemisphere. So long as Charles Seymour, fickle, faithless as he had proved himself, was known by the forsaken Octaroon to breathe the air of the New World — so long was that her country — and the one only portion of the created earth on which she loved to linger. To think of Seymour, and to remember that the love she deemed an angel might have owned, should have been hers in days gone by — hers to command, the while he knelt before her, and she had twined her fingers in his glossy hair, and looked the love she scarcely dared to whisper; to think of this, I say, was the one secret comfort to the Southern slave girl, when cold looks, and sometimes even biting words — two-edged, and with a double meaning — cut deep into the sensitive heart, still sore from many an unhealed wound.

She very soon — before she had been a week a school-teacher — felt certain that the secret of her

birth was known, and that, not in mere wantonness of power were the cruel stabs inflicted.

It was on the occasion of a dancing-lesson (when the parents of the pupils were invited as witnesses of their children's progress to perfection) that poor Zoe noticed first that she was shunned. Quadrilles were being formed, and Mademoiselle Ferrand, who was tacitly acknowledged as the most graceful "mover" through the figures that the most fastidious critics had ever looked upon, was requested by the master to make one of a small quadrille composed of some of the younger children, who required a quick intelligence to remedy their frequent mistakes.

She stood amongst them with her small regal head erect, and her statuesque and perfect figure, full, and yet lithe and graceful — a figure which had never been altered from its perfection by the compression of a deforming *corset* — bending slightly to her small partner in the dance, whilst a sweet melancholy smile was on her exquisite lips, the smile they always wore when children's guileless faces looked up trustingly to hers.

The first few notes of a pretty set of quadrilles from the opera of "Martha" had sounded through the room, when a sudden order to "stop" from the sonorous voice of Miss Selwood called every one's attention to the cause of such a startling command. Not long were the "assistants" at the dancing-lesson kept in suspense; for speedily there arose from the separate benches on which they had been seated, two anxious

mothers, careful of the safety of their little ones, and eager, as it too soon appeared, to snatch them from the vicinage of the Octaroon.

"Come to me, my daughter." "You shall dance in the next set, my child." "It is quite impossible to allow you to take part in that quadrille." These were among the words, which, as the mothers pounced with eagerness upon their befrilled and crinolined darlings, fell like a knell upon the ears of her, who, as though she had with shameless front, broken the laws of God and man, was left there standing in the midst, alone with her unmerited disgrace!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

"This human living multitude
Was savage, cunning, blind, and rude.

Over the populous solitude
Like one fierce cloud over a waste of waves
Hung tyranny."

I SHALL leave to the imagination of the reader the mortifications which, after that eventful day, fell to the lot of the Octaroon. Let him picture her to himself as one by every living soul within her reach tabooed and shunned; an ostracism which was not confined to indoor life; for during the daily out-of-door exercise enjoyed by the teachers and pupils of the Misses Selwood's classic academy, she, the poor despised one, paced, companionless — so to speak, along the Squares or Battery, whilst the rest walked on in pairs in intimate and cheerful conversation.

Even in the sacred house of God, she would, beyond all doubt, have been, according to the rule observed in such case, separated from her white companions; but, fortunately, on the Sunday following the memorable dancing-lesson, a slight cold, exaggerated into real sickness by the mistresses of the seminary, kept the young girl at home.

On the Thursday following, a distribution of prizes was to take place at the school. It was a ceremony of great importance, and the preparations for the event

were conducted on what the Misses Selwood called the most liberal scale. But liberal as they deemed themselves, there was throughout that busy time an undue amount of labour imposed upon the teachers, and upon Zoe in particular: for, not content with keeping the willing girl afoot throughout the hot September day, which preceded the grand half-yearly fête, Miss Medora despatched her late in the afternoon to several distant stores for articles required on the morrow.

"It won't be dark, I reckon," the lady said. She was an angular, middle-aged woman, in spectacles, and an eccentric head-gear. "So you can walk there and back. The exercise will do you good, for you're getting powerful stout."

With this encouragement to an exertion which included a walk of three miles and upwards through the crowded streets, Zoe set forth with uncomplaining lips to do the lady's bidding. The sun was still high in the heavens, for it was hardly four o'clock, and the heat felt almost tropical in its insensibility. Not a vestige of a cloud was in the clear blue sky, and on the white dusty side-walks on the shady side of the streets, men clad in light summer garments strolled on, hat in hand, and panting for air in the breezeless atmosphere, around them. Drawing her veil over her face, and stepping quickly — *too* quickly, for the heat which burned both within and around her on that sultry afternoon was very trying, Zoe went forward on her way. She was not ill — indeed nature had endowed her with health and vigour above those given to the average of her sex, and when she left the house she felt not even the

beginning of weariness after the exertions of the day: but though the girl's step was elastic, and her courage high, a feeling of lassitude began to creep over her, when her commissions having been duly executed, she commenced her walk homewards.

Six o'clock had struck, and, it being now nearly the end of September, the short twilight had all but commenced, when Zoe's tedious walk began. Two long, weary miles there lay before her, and her tired limbs began to fail, while her temples throbbed with the fever of fatigue. At that moment an omnibus going in the direction of University Square came in sight, and crowded although it evidently was by passengers inside and out, Zoe gladly made the sign to the conductor, which brought the cumbrous vehicle to a stand-still by the side-walk.

At first it seemed, so densely packed were the occupants, that no room could be made for the newcomer; but after half-a-minute's jostling and pressing, space enough was procured for the exhausted girl, who, after she had taken her seat between two lanky, thin-faced New York citizens, lifted (it was a thoughtless act) the veil from her flushed face, and glanced around her at her fellow-passengers.

There were more men than women present there: but *en revanche*, one of the latter sex, who was seated at the further extremity of the omnibus, might, in point of size, have done duty for two. She was dressed in a gaudy gown of cheap cotton, resplendent with all the rainbow hues of purple, red, and yellow. On her

broad, massive shoulders there was stretched a *barège* shawl, printed with flowers of every possible and impossible colour, while a bonnet of immoderate dimensions, from which hung a green gauze veil, concealed from the eyes of the curious, a face which was perseveringly turned away from the remaining fifteen occupants of the overfilled human ménagerie.

The crowded omnibus had not, after Zoe's entrance, moved on many paces, when she felt the small space she occupied suddenly encroached upon, and looking up, she was startled to perceive an angry, savage expression on every face, while two men (those nearest to the door) simultaneously touched the arm of the conductor, and indignantly desired him to stop.

"For there is a cussed negress in this 'bus," exclaimed one of the men, "an infernal darkey, darn her —"

"And darn you too" (this was to the conductor), "for putting the dirty smut along with white folks."

And with these and similar ebullitions of their rage, several of the passengers sprang out upon the pavement, where they stood stamping and gesticulating, whilst insisting on the immediate expulsion of the offending party, who was no other than the stout, showily-dressed female we have been describing. The conductor, dismayed at the consequences of his inadvertence (for when a few minutes previously he had opened the door for the obnoxious individual the fact of her colour had escaped his notice), lost no time in obeying the orders of his infuriated passengers; but,

greatly to his surprise, when he somewhat roughly took hold of the stout woman's arm in order to hasten her egress, she showed an inclination to resist his mandate.

"Oh! for the love of Heaven, please, sir," were the imploring words she used. "Take pity on me — I am *near my time* of trial, so near that I thought I must have fainted when I got into the 'bus, I was so hot and tired. I wouldn't — no indeed, I wouldn't have intruded; but I felt like dying — indeed, indeed, I did, sir. So perhaps the gentlefolks will have some pity, and let me ride a mile — it isn't more to where I live."

The conductor, who had a human heart within his breast, listened to the coloured woman's words, and pitied her. He told the gentlemen and ladies, standing — all of them excepting Zoe — on the side-walk, what the free negress had pleaded in excuse for her intrusion. Perhaps he thought — but he should have better known the temper of his countrymen — that in compassion for the woman's sickness, and her strait, they would have granted her the boon she prayed for; but if this hope were in his mind, a moment only was sufficient to disabuse him; for without one dissentient voice from man or woman, the crowd upon the pavement clamoured as a right that the coloured "creature" should receive no mercy at their hands.

"She had no business there," they argued, "poisoning the air that filled the nostrils of those free and enlightened and most exclusive citizens. There were

carriages set apart for people of her colour, where they could herd together without annoying by their presence the fastidious senses of their superiors. There were —" but we need not dwell at length — and the more especially as space is beginning to fail us — upon vituperations such as these, vituperations which, together with the mocking words of liberty and equality, have sounded from the lying lips of boastful hypocrites, through brazen and polluted trumpets, to the utmost portions of the earth. Suffice it that to the piteous appeal of a suffering woman, about to pay the painful penalty of our first parents' sin, those cruel men were deaf; and that the poor and friendless descendant of a persecuted race was, in the presence of those unchivalrous — and may we not add degraded — Northern citizens, dragged forth by iron hands from her place of temporary refuge. With cries of agony, and with supplications which would have moved a heart of stone, she prayed that in her dire extremity they would take pity on her, and would not thrust her forth alone to die upon the public street; but all her prayers were vain, and with a jerk to which he was urged by the remonstrances of more than one of the impatient passengers, the conductor succeeded in freeing the vehicle from the hated presence of the coloured Christian woman.

The whole affair had only been the work of a few miserable minutes; and Zoe, who had been a horror-struck witness of the scene, had hardly brought herself to comprehend all its hideous features when she saw

her unfortunate compatriot stretched upon the ground, with extended arms, and screams that rent the air.

"Let me descend," she cried, almost frantically to the conductor, who was actively employed in replacing in their seats the now satisfied white oppressors of the negro race. "Let me descend. I cannot bear this cruelty. The woman is dying, and you have killed her!"

They looked upon her lovely face, those pitiless and prejudiced men; and, despite its glorious beauty, both of soul and feature, they only saw there, lighted by the low rays of the western sun, the "brand" upon her smooth young brow — the faint slight mark which told them that the generous utterer of those eager words was one who had no right to raise her voice amongst God's privileged creatures.

And so with one accord they thrust her out! — out from amongst them — out upon the heated pavement, where, prone upon the ground, there lay the wretched negress, who, writhing in mortal anguish, looked up to Heaven for the mercy which she had prayed for at the hands of man in vain!

CHAPTER XL.

"But one was mute, her cheeks and lips most fair,
Changing their hue like lilies newly blown,
Beneath a bright acacia's shadowy hair,
Waved by the wind amid the sunny noon,
Showed that her soul was quivering."

OF course a crowd had begun to gather, from the moment that the stoppage of the omnibus, and the disgorging of its contents, gave notice that something unusual had occurred either to the vehicle or to those by whom it had been thronged.

Zoe paid little or no attention to the rapidly-increasing multitude of men, women, and children of all orders and degrees, who, as is usual in such cases, pressed round the sufferer, impeding the free passage of the air, and considerably lessening her chances of recovery. There was nothing certainly either very novel or especially interesting in the sudden indisposition of a "female" appertaining to the lower orders, and one the colour of whose skin now that the veil was removed from her face, betrayed to the initiated the secret of her birth. But little as there was to gratify curiosity in the stout middle-class negress, whose sufferings — to judge from her groans — became every moment more intense, and for whose removal, as an encumbrance to the street, measures were already being taken, the same could not be said of the young and

beautiful girl, who, utterly regardless as it seemed of the interest she excited, was assisting by soothing words and by such attention as women alone know how to pay, in the lifting from the ground (previous to her being conveyed to the hospital) of the injured woman.

Meanwhile, having mingled with the crowd to wile away some passing moments of their well-nigh idle lives, three of those thoughtless loungers — club *habitués* — men who make the pursuit of women, the chances of the dice, and the excitements of the betting-book their pastimes and their studies; three of such men I say, strong in the insolence of their strength and wealth, pushed to the inmost ranks of the dense throng, and looked inquiringly around them.

“Only a fat coloured woman taken worse,” had been the thoughtless answer of a stander-by to the inquiries they had made. The answer was not one to lead on further the three pleasure-seekers; but they had gone so far that they still pressed forward, till as I have said, they reached the centre of attraction, where, a shutter having just been brought by some policemen, the latter assisted by Zoe, were in the act of lifting the wailing woman from the ground.

There was still light enough, although the day was dying fast, to show to the newcomers the wondrous beauty of the Octaroon. She was bending over the negress (who, as it now appeared, had received considerable injury during the summary process of her ejection), and the pale contour of her faultless cheek, the gentle compassion of the tender eyes, and the

quivering of her full, expressive lip, was a vision of loveliness for which the men who gazed upon it were ill-prepared to witness.

"'Gad! Fenwick," exclaimed one of the new-comers, "what a beautiful girl!" and disengaging his arm from that of his companion, he was making a step towards her, when Fenwick stopped him, by saying, with a laugh —

"All right — fair play, however, and first come first served. I have the advantage of a previous introduction;" and so saying, with a kind of exaggerated courtesy, offensive by force of ultra ceremony, he took off his hat to Zoe, saying as he did so —

"Mademoiselle Ferrand, you will of course accept of my protection now. I cannot allow you to remain unattended in the streets, where one so beautiful can hardly expect to be safe from insult." The blood mounted to Zoe's pure and lovely face, when, having listened to his words, her eyes rested for a moment on Captain Fenwick's face.

"Is it you," she slowly said, "who talk to me of protection? You, whose insults have deprived one so poor and friendless of a home. You, a soldier and a gentleman, whose duty it should be to help the weak, and to defend the fallen. Go, do not speak to me," she continued, seeing that he was about to address her, while his friends, and such of the crowd as had not followed the "shutter," listened with wide open ears to what was passing. "Go, do not speak to me. The world says that I have fallen low," she added passionately,

"but not so low, God help me, but that I can look with scorn on one who has proved himself a coward to a woman, and a traitor to his God."

From her pale, trembling lips the angry, incoherent words broke forth, and Fenwick, though he tried to laugh away his awkwardness, felt cowed and mortified. Not so, however, was it with his companions, who jeered and chaffed him aggravatingly, following Zoe, when, with shaking limbs and a face on which no shade of its rich colouring lingered, she strove to escape from the crowd which compassed her about.

"By Jove, Fenwick, old fellow, I'd look twice next time, if I were you, before I spooned an unprotected female!" exclaimed the youngest of the party — he who had been foremost in the attempt to lead the Octaroon into conversation; "but I say now," he went on, following her very closely, and speaking in tones which he intended to be insinuating, "I say, don't mind old Fenwick, he was so long among the Comanche ladies, that he thinks he may spoon every woman like a squaw. Now, here are Jack and I — Jack, speak up for yourself — who wouldn't hurt a pretty woman's feelings for the world. Jack's got an affair on hand just now — havn't you, old fellow? — and we were going to meet his little "party" out at —s. What say you to a spree now? By Jove! I never saw such eyes — and then we'll have a dance at the —"

But if this fast young New York gentleman were about to propose any further plans for the amusement of his lovely new acquaintance, his intention was nipped

in the bud by Captain Fenwick, who, pushing him vigorously on one side, interposed his bulkier person between Zoe and her persecutor. The night was closing in, and as the hope of excitement had subsided, the last lingering idlers — spectators of the scene we have been recording — had, with the exception of Fenwick and his friends, proceeded on their way. Zoe felt little fear, for the hour was not late, and there is, according to the proverb, safety in a multitude; but, although not afraid, anger — fierce, overpowering, and almost unmaidenly in its violence — drove the life-blood to her heart, and at that terrible moment — shall we avow it of one whom nature had made to be man's solace and his friend? — of one neither too bright nor good —

“For human nature's daily food,
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears, and smiles.”

Shall we, I say, avow it that this perfect woman, “nobly planned,” could, while she strove in vain, by quickening her pace, to escape from her insulters, have found it in her heart (for the hot Southern blood coursed madly through her veins) to administer, with her own delicate and dimpled hand, as severe a personal chastisement as was ever deserved by mortal man?

She walked on in the direction of University Square, with hasty steps, and lips strongly compressed, lest she should betray in words the impotent anger raging in her breast. Fenwick, after his unceremonious hint to

his adventurous friends, kept his station on Zoe's right hand, whilst his younger companion pursued his agreeable remarks on the other side, and the silent and already appropriated "Jack," who appeared to have rather a *prononcé* talent for silence, brought up the rear, whistling "*Beautiful Star*," and beating time with his agate-headed bamboo upon the pavement.

For more than five minutes — minutes which seemed as so many hours to the indignant girl — had she inwardly fretted beneath this coarse and unmanly treatment, when suddenly she felt that a hand had stolen beneath the black silk mantilla which she wore, and was pressing against her quickly-beating heart. Only for one short instant did those sacrilegious fingers linger there, for with a gesture, splendid in its wild, passionate grace, the Southern maiden flung the cowardly insulter back, and stood there proudly facing him.

What burning words she might have said had time been given her, we dare not think. She might have cursed him in her anger, might have — but wherefore linger over this short, trying scene, when only to name the new actor in the little drama is enough to prove that Zoe found a bolder, stronger champion than her own weak woman's voice or tongue had proved.

Was it chance, or the blessed Providence which watches aloft over the feeble, which guided Charley Seymour to the spot where his loved and lost one stood, under the uncertain gaslight, with flashing eyes, and, if he saw aright, with her small hand uplifted, as though in act to strike. For a moment he stood as if

paralyzed by astonishment, and then raising his hat with a respect which could not be mistaken, he said,

"This is, indeed, a surprise! I was not aware you were in New York. Can I be of any service to you?" he continued, looking with angry suspicion at the two men, for "Jack" had already taken his departure, probably conjecturing that their chances of amusement, as far as the Octaroon was concerned, were over.

Very quick of wit and ready of resource (as Jaspar Gordon had once remarked) was his fair young daughter, or she could never, at that moment, when surprise, rapture, and deadly fear for him were warring in her breast, have answered in a voice which scarcely trembled, that Captain Fenwick was an acquaintance — a gentleman, whose nieces were her pupils, and that —"

But at this point in her explanation the two baffled friends, finding that the object of their joint attack was not without a champion and protector, deemed it advisable, all things considered, to wish the young lady a courteously-sounding good-night, and leave her with her newly-found friend.

And thus it fell that Zoe Gordon stood at night-fall, beneath the brilliant lamps, with Charles Seymour looking sternly into her pleading eyes, while her clasped hands rested half in fear, and half in bliss unspeakable, upon the arm which, as yet, had not been extended towards her either in pardon or in love.

CHAPTER XLI.

"Away, away, from men and towns,
To the wild wood, and the downs —
To the silent wilderness
Where the soul need not repress
Its music, lest it should not find
An echo in another's mind."

"WRONG! You foolish, trembling child! Wrong to grant me this one parting boon, after all that I have borne and suffered! Wrong to restore my failing faith in woman's truth and virtue — the faith which you had shaken to its foundation; although, my persecuted darling, *you* were not to blame for all the evil that was done and suffered! Thank Heaven, that at last I know the truth; although that truth proclaims that, in my jealous madness, I was the coiner of my own hard fortunes, and the sower of the storm of which we have both reaped the bitter fruits."

It was evening again — the close of the day following that on which Zoe had so unexpectedly met the lover of whose faith and constancy she had (strange as it may appear) never for an instant doubted. A glowing afternoon it was — the sultry ending to one of those scorching days of lingering summer which, in Northern America especially, mark the first autumn months of the revolving year.

It was a sort of holiday at the Seminary — a concession granted to all parties interested in the further-

ance of the grand half-yearly event — namely, the *fête* — in which the rising Sapphos and Corinnes of University Square were to display their learning and accomplishments before their admiring and envious friends and acquaintances. During the busy days preceding the all-important *soirée*, teaching and application were at a discount, whilst the carpenters and upholsterers were actively engaged in arranging the “stage,” or dais, upon which, crowned with their classic wreaths, the daughters of the U-nited States were to “whip creation” by the astounding spectacle of their “strong-mindedness and long-headedness.”

In common with the rest of the teachers, Zoe took advantage of her few hours of liberty, ostensibly to refresh herself by a solitary walk upon the Battery, but in reality to keep an appointment which she had made with Seymour, to grant him, at all risks and hazards, what she called a last and farewell interview.

In the meantime she had, at his request, written a letter — it had taken her hours to pen it — in which she had forestalled her promised confession, by giving him a detailed account of all that had passed at New Orleans after their last meeting. Zoe had sent this letter by the cook (a coloured woman whom she could trust) to the hotel where Seymour had taken up his abode. Her messenger — willing though she was to do a service for her young compatriot — had not found it in her power to leave the house till late in the afternoon; so that Zoe (when the heat of the day being over she departed for her walk) encountered Black Sy'

(for so the schoolgirls called the willing drudge) at the corner of the Square on her return from her distant mission.

They stopped and chatted for a moment — Zoe, with her thick veil lowered over her face, to ask the negress if she had safely delivered her message, and Sy' to answer in the affirmative, with many an extra word and comment on the simple question asked of her.

“De gen'l'man hab de letter, and put him in his pocket. He say, ‘All right; you tell my sister I’ll be there afore her.’”

How glad bright Zoe felt — how joyous and how hopeful! Was the world the same to-day as that which yesterday had seemed so bleak, and dark, and friendless? Why, *he* was near her now — was near, and loved her still! for had he not been true to her, he could not have answered with such friendly words the letter she had written. Zoe had half feared to tell him all, and yet she could not bring herself to meet his angry gaze while the fierce, dreadful doubt yet lingered on his mind that she who had sworn to him such vows of tender love, had given her beauty to another, and was no longer worthy of his passionate devotion.

So her joy was great to find that he believed her, and that ere an hour was past her pardon would be sealed — (she never, for a passing moment, laid the charge of fickleness to *him*) — and that, once more — her truthful hand in his — they could speak low fare-

well words of tenderness, and of a love so pure, that angels might look upon their parting, and see in their sad hearts no thoughts of guilt or sin.

At that blissful moment there was no room within her guileless breast for anger or revenge; and even when, soon after, a man — maybe he called himself a gentleman — seeing two women, one of them a coloured one, standing there together on the pavement, thrust the veiled Southern girl aside with the cane he swung around him, there was no place, as I have said, for anger in her heart, as, following on her way, she could have lifted up her voice in gratitude o'erpowering for the great blessing of a trusted friend.

When Seymour spoke the words which form the opening of the present chapter, the lovers — has the name *quite* been forfeited? — were seated in a closed carriage, procured by Seymour for the drive with Zoe, which, on the night before, he had determined on.

He had met her with a heart full of bitter self-upbraidings, and of a love increased tenfold by his deep pity for her wrongs and sufferings. The carriage, driven by an elderly human machine of dusky hue, and who sat on his elevated perch, regardless of all, save the performance of his charioteering duties, proceeded at a slow pace in the direction of the water-works. The shadows of the trees they passed were lengthening, and the road was gradually losing its thronged and busy aspect, when, dismounting from the carriage, Zoe and her companion entered the enclosed grounds in the neighbourhood of the works, and finding

a quiet and retired spot, rested there, while they continued a conversation which had already called an abiding hue of crimson to the fair cheek of the Octaroon, and lent a dazzling lustre to the eyes she dared not raise to him who pleaded at her feet.

"For what and whom is it that you would doom us both to misery and despair?" he asked. "Is it for the man, who, according to your own belief, may not be your lawful husband, and who is steeped to the very lips in the dregs of infamy and vice? Or is it for your father, who has sold his child to —"

"Oh, hush! hush!" she cried. "Remember that he is my father, and that my mother — now a saint in heaven — bade me, with her latest breath, to honour and obey him."

An angry exclamation, of which it was as well, perhaps, that Zoe did not catch the meaning, broke from Seymour in his deeply-felt disappointment; for he was very angry — angry with the dead who had come a second time, as he believed, to place its skeleton form between him and her he idolized — dashing the cup of happiness from his lips, with its cold, fleshless fingers, and daring him to place his arm of flesh and blood round that warm, breathing form — sentient with life's stormiest, strongest passions, and panting (for well he read the struggle in her breast) to give up all for him; and (forgetting every lesson of her virtuous youth) to say — "I am yours through time, and for eternity. Do with me as it best may please you."

He saw the struggle, and he knew that however willing is the pure and unearth-stained spirit to do its saintly duty — flesh is very weak — and that the passionate and tender girl, too feeble to seek safety in flight, would find it hard, indeed, to stand firm against his pleadings. So, for the darkness had come at last, and only a few trembling stars looked down upon them — he led her to the carriage, and without a spoken word — he drew her suddenly towards him, and showered kisses on her fevered lips.

She broke away from him at last — and (it was she feared her last resource) speaking in seeming anger, she reproached him for his cruelty.

“You are barbarous,” she panted forth. “You take advantage of my weakness, and your strength. You treat me as a poor and wicked slave girl! I cannot be your wife in honour, and in the sight of God — and as that God looks down upon me now, I swear I will not be your paramour.”

He had tried in vain to stop the words. He had laid his hand upon her lips — his own he did not dare again to press there — and, murmuring prayers and entreaties to the excited girl, had thrown himself upon his knees — a suppliant for her mercy.

“It is well for you,” he said, — “you who can look coldly on at misery, whose depths you are incapable of comprehending, to call upon the God who made us both for succour and support, whilst I, whom that same God has made of softer stuff, can find no refuge in my dark despair. Once more I ask, have

you no fear, Zoe — for the consequences of your cruelty? for I here warn you, Child, that men are not made as women are, and that while you can enter your silent closet, and kneeling before your crucifix, can find comfort in self-sacrifice, I shall go forth into a world of crime to drown my senses in the intoxication of forbidden pleasures; and the end will be, according to your belief, my precious one — the hell which your rejection will have commenced for me on earth."

He waited eagerly for her answer; for in this outspoken threat he had expended the last arrow in his quiver, and her reply might take away his only hope.

He watched the workings of her speaking face with breathless interest, and when at last she murmured, in a tone whose utter hopelessness was mingled with unalterable decision.

"God have mercy on us both!" he flung from him the small trembling hands, on which the tears were raining, with a fury indescribable.

"Cold," he muttered, "cold and heartless ever! Ah! why have I wasted thus my warmest, best affections upon one who, for a mere chimera of the brain — a fancied duty to a villain who would have sold his newly-married wife — pah! must I say the word? — for dirty dollars to the highest bidder — can sacrifice the man to whom she vowed her earliest faith and love? Ah, Zoe!" he continued in a gentler tone, for he was moved to bitter anguish by the spectacle his own words had conjured up. "O Zoe! my own pre-

cious love — my beautiful, my cherished one, can nothing move you to have pity on us both? Think of the joys before us — together in a land where freedom is something better than a name, with youth and love to gild each happy hour, and not a single care, or passing cloud of sorrow shall dare to cast its shadow on your radiant brow, my darling, only love!”

He had regained possession of her taper fingers, and was pressing them with passionate eagerness to his pale lips and throbbing brow. She did not answer him by word or sign, but leant back trembling, while a shuddering sigh broke from her parched lips.

Seymour gazed upon her death-like face and a vague terror seized him.

“Speak to me,” he cried, “only one word, to say I have not tortured you to death. Press my hand only, my poor patient love, to tell me that this fiery trial has not worn you out; and then — then I will try to bear with fortitude this last cruel blow, and — and — we will talk together calmly of our future, while —”

But ere he could proceed, Zoe, making one last successful effort to combat the fierce temptation which assailed her, took his strong, yet trembling hands within her own, and whispered low —

“My own, my only love, forgive me! It is hard to bear,” she said; and as the voice, soft as the spell of melancholy music, fell upon her lover’s ear, she parted the waving hair upon his brow, and stroked it fondly. “It is hard to bear, but if I, a feeble woman, can come out a conqueror in this bitter strife, will *you*

be wanting? — you, a man with courage to support the ills of life, and power to defend me, darling, even against yourself? I am very poor," she went on to say; and had the light permitted, he would have seen that a faint smile flickered across her sweet, sad mouth — "I am very poor — so poor, my Charley, that I have but one only earthly gift to bring to you, should — should the day ever come when, in the face of God and man, I may stand beside you as your wife. And should this empty marriage be pronounced illegal, why, dearest, what a joy unspeakable will it bring to both, to feel that in my hour of temptation God did not abandon the weak creature he has made, and that you — ah! Charley — dearest, let me for one short moment lay my head upon your heart. Give me one kiss — one blessed kiss of pardon and of promise, and then for mercy's sake tempt me no more, but leave me guiltless still, with the cherished memory of your love."

She threw her arms round him as she spoke, and for a second clung to him with almost painful force. For a second only, and then with a hand which did its duty (her own heart only knew how rebelliously), she pulled the check-string, and once more sank back breathlessly on the cushions of the carriage.

Seymour made no further effort to obtain from the pale but resolute girl the concession for which he had so ardently implored. He felt chilled to the heart by the determination she had displayed — a determination which he mentally called overstrained and unnatural;

and when the carriage stopped, which it did within a few hundred yards of Zoe's temporary home, he handed her out in silence, and offering her his arm with a mute gesture, they walked on together in the stillness of the starless night.

"You are not angry," said the deeply-mortified girl, when they were about to emerge from a darker street into the well-lighted precincts of University Square — "You are not angry with me, dear? It was for your sake more than for my own; for — and I swear it to you by my love for my dead mother, that, but for shaming you, I would follow you with joy and gratitude to the world's end."

"I believe you," he said, huskily. "By the God that made me, I believe that you are an angel sent from heaven to guide a wandering sinner on his way. One kiss — one more, my own sweet, faithful love; and now go home to pray the innocent prayers, which must be heard in heaven, that we may meet one day again on earth, in happiness unspeakable, and, by you at least, deserved."

He strained her to his heart, and pressed his lips to hers in one wild, passionate caress; but the next moment he was gone, and Zoe, bewildered and heart-sick, proceeded slowly towards the gas-lit square, with shaking limbs and a void within her breast, which the mere consciousness of a great victory won, was powerless to fill up.

CHAPTER XLII.

"And we shall sit together unmolested,
And words of true-love pass from tongue to tongue,
As singing-birds from one bough to another."

EIGHT O'CLOCK had sounded from the great time-piece which stood in the entrance-hall of the Misses Selwood's dignified abode; and already the carriages of the expected guests were rattling over the pavement of the square, while thundering knocks kept the coloured footman, hired for the occasion, constantly on the alert, to give admittance to the visitors.

The fair inmates of that classic ground (for so the sapient superiors delighted to call their school) were all attired in "company" costumes, and ready for the performance of the various duties which had been allotted to them. The Misses Selwood, severe in iron-grey silk dresses, stood at either door of the two well-furnished drawing-rooms, while the eighty objects of their "strictly-maternal care" were, in their uniform dresses of spotless white muslin, scattered through the apartments already rapidly filling with gaily-dressed ladies, and with gentlemen, who as the brothers, fathers, and friends of the "young academicians," had obtained the right of *entrée*.

Zoe had received, on her return the evening before, a well-merited lecture from Miss Medora Selwood, on the impropriety of her conduct in absenting herself

at so late an hour from the conventual protection of University Square.

"We trust," the lady said, "that so daring an innovation on our rules may not again call for our animadversion. Should we be obliged, on any future occasion, to express our condemnation of your conduct, we take this opportunity of informing you that not even the esteemed recommendation of Mrs. Thornfield will be available in preventing your expulsion from Selwood House Academy."

Zoe listened to the rebuke without a shade of anger, or a single word of protest; for even could she have excused her dereliction (which was clearly impossible), her heart was too full either for speech or explanation. With a graceful, simple obeisance, then, she left the august presence of her monitress, and endeavoured to find in the multifarious duties imposed upon her some escape from the tumultuous thoughts which welled up in, and crossed one another in troubled confusion through her breast.

Eight o'clock, as I have said, had struck, and the guests were rapidly filling the brilliantly-lighted rooms, when Zoe, with a faint roseate colour (the effect of her exertions in the cause of gaiety) upon her cheeks, and dressed like the pupils, in white muslin, took her station at the grand piano, on which it had been decided that she should do duty as musician during the festive hours.

She had taken off her gloves, and was about to dash into the opening bars of Haydn's "Surprise," when

a name (sonorously repeated by an individual who, with copper-coloured face and hands, adorned with monster shirt-collar and thick, white cotton gloves, performed the important functions of groom of the chambers) arrested her attention, and caused for a moment the current of her blood to stop its flow.

MRS. JOHN LINCOLN MORSE.

Such were the names that struck her ears, and which, pronounced with a clearness admitting of no possibility of misapprehension, arrested the opening prelude to the grand old air, and caused Miss Medora to advance, with stately step and stern reproof upon her brow, towards the instrument.

Zoe, startled by her approach, recovered her presence of mind speedily; nor was there in her performance of the task anything to show that her every thought — ay, even her very eyes were fixed upon a tall, angular woman, dressed in the extreme of bad and meretricious taste, who had taken up her station on a bench almost touching the noisy instrument from which crushed out (it was the second air which Zoe had played, and one performed in honour of a young lady who had got well over her *Pons Asinorum*) the triumphant chords of "See the Conquering Hero Comes." To the delight of the pale performer, who from the first moment when she heard again that hated name, had felt a rush of hope flood her young spirit like the rays of light falling from heaven on a dungeon's wall; to her

delight, I repeat, Zoe saw that the lady announced as Mrs. John Link Morse was the intimate acquaintance, relation, or friend — she had as yet no means of ascertaining which — of the only one amongst those fourscore school-girls with whom she herself could boast of any degree of sympathy or confidence. With a patient endurance, only to be understood by those who have themselves undergone the harrowing tortures of suspense, Zoe, with a heart full to bursting with the mingled emotions of hope and fear, played her humbler and subordinate part in that small drama. And ere she sank to rest well, indeed, was she rewarded, for Miss Steward, the pretty, lively girl of fifteen, whose narrow bed was placed nearest to that of the French governess, was nothing loth to answer the questions which the latter put to her with a tact worthy of her birth and "raising;" and long before the last light had been extinguished in the now quiet house Zoe had learnt, with a thrill of rapture easier to be imagined than described, that to the man so long detested and despised she was bound by no ties, human or divine; and that to throw herself on Seymour's breast, and pour out there her endless wealth of love, was a privilege which even her own conscience, stern and inexorable albeit it was, could not henceforth deny her. Very happily that night she fell asleep, her last thoughts lingering over the first measures she would take to hold communication with her lover, who still, she doubted not, was in his lonely chamber at the Astor House Hotel, brooding over her inflexible and ruthless fiat.

CHAPTER XLIII.

"Sail forth into the Sea of Life,

For gentleness and love and trust
Prevail o'er angry wave and gust;
And in the wreck of noble lives
Something immortal still survives."

"A TELEGRAM for Mademoiselle Ferrand!" News for the obscure teacher, whose birth-place was a mystery, and whose conduct had begun, in the opinion of the severe Misses Selwood, to inspire grave doubts of her respectability and sense of decorum.

Zoe read the paper (she received it on the morning following the *fête*) with the eyes of the assembled school upon her; and having made herself mistress of its contents, she said, with tearless eyes and a voice which did not falter,

"My father is ill, madam, in New Orleans, and a friend has telegraphed to me that I should be near him; so, with your leave, I must lose no time in making preparations for my departure."

And having so said, she placed the missive she had received in the hands of Miss Medora, waiting that lady's reply in silence.

Had the girl displayed signs of grief or agitation, it is possible that these stern philosophers, and most unsentimental rulers of that well-ordered establishment,

would have shown some sympathy with her sorrow; but Zoe's woe — if, indeed, it existed — was so hidden under the mask of dignified composure, that the immediate acceptance of her resignation (with scarcely a remark upon its cause) followed as a matter of course; and the emancipated teacher, after receiving the wages due to her for her services, retired at once to pack up her small belongings previous to leaving for ever the scene of her past labours.

There was no time to lose — for in an hour a train for Philadelphia would leave the "Depôt" — and during those sixty minutes Zoe had to crowd the various tasks of "packing," and writing a few hurried lines to Seymour — lines which would contain both the sad and the joyful news she had to tell, and which it was her purpose to leave for him at his hotel on her way to the station.

When the hackney-carriage which contained the contemned Octaroon drove from the door, the windows of the house were crowded by young faces watching the departure of the French governess. They had often jeered at her, those thoughtless children — often, in their unmeaning merriment, avenged themselves for tasks imposed by the proud, dignified "mam'selle," by calling her among themselves the "yaller gal" or "nigger Zo," and other such-like terms of ridicule and reprobation; but when they saw her go, and marked the tears in her soft, truthful eyes, their hearts relented, and remembering — even during the short time that she had been their teacher — many a gentle look and

word of kind encouragement, they thought for a few passing moments regretfully of the gentle Octaroon.

If Zoe had either hoped or expected that Seymour would be at home to receive in person the announcement of her departure, she was disappointed; for, in answer to her question as to whether he was visible, the words were, that he had been gone out an hour.

"You will give him this note," Zoe said, as she slipped a dollar into the Irish waiter's hand.

"Sure and I will, God bless your purty face," replied the man. "Will I be afther running with it now?"

"But you don't know where he is?" Zoe said, impatiently.

"Sure an' I don't, but I could ax afther," said Paddy, scratching his dishevelled head; while Zoe bade the coachman (for each minute that remained was valuable) hurry on towards the Dépôt.

Once in the car she had leisure to think — to grieve — and dare I add, seeing that the telegram had summoned her on such a mournful errand — to rejoice. The despatch was from Dr. Lane, and gave, of course, no particulars of her father's state; but Zoe could not but believe that his danger was imminent, and also that the recall had been made without his knowledge, for he would not willingly, as she felt assured, have exposed her to the danger to which in the Slave States he well knew her to be liable.

Of that danger — unaccountable as it may appear — she thought but little; for the intense happiness of

feeling herself freed from her hated matrimonial ties swallowed up all other images of dread. Besides, would not Seymour follow on her footsteps — Seymour, who was rich and powerful, and who would, in the event of her losing the parent who had shown himself so inefficient a protector, be all in all to her who had not proved herself wholly unworthy of his love? And so she journeyed on, without let or hindrance, and all the way by railroad, deeming it the safest and the swiftest means of arriving at her journey's end.

On the particulars of that journey, totally uneventful as it proved, we need not dwell. During its progress Zoe allowed herself neither repose nor rest, but still went on untiringly, supported by the anxious hope to find her father yet alive, and by the consciousness that he in whom, next to Heaven, she placed her trust was already following on her track, and would ere long rejoin her in the great capital of the Slave Power — the still half-deserted (for the yellow-fever season was yet scarcely over) sun-scorched city of New Orleans.

CHAPTER XLIV.

"I thought to act a solemn comedy
Upon the painted scene of this new world,
And to attain my own peculiar ends
By some such plot of mingled good and ill
As others weave; but there arose a power
Which grasped and snatched the threads of my device,
And turned it to a net of ruin."

UPON his bed in the fifth story of a poor house in Canal Street, lay Jaspar Gordon, weak and fever-stricken, but still alive, and likely to deceive the expectations of those who had predicted that he would never arise from that couch of suffering again. Dr. Lane, who had never ceased his friendly intercourse with the all-but disgraced and poverty-stricken planter, had attended him through a very sharp attack of fever; and as during his delirious ravings, Gordon had, more than once, asked for his daughter, the kind physician had thought it his duty to warn Zoe of her father's danger.

When, after a journey which taxed her powers to the utmost, Zoe arrived at the house to which she had been directed in the telegraph despatch, she was ushered by a slipshod Irish help up the dirty, narrow staircase, to the sick man's garret.

"Is he better?" Zoe said, in a tone so low that her attendant could hardly catch its import; but imagination supplied the place of hearing, and the "Biddy" of the moment answered readily —

"Troth thin, an' he is; an' a beautiful sup o' broth he had the morning, shurely!"

So the girl mounted the hundred steps with a lightened heart, and showed a smile upon her fair, colourless face as she stood beside her father's bed.

He did not demonstrate much satisfaction on her entrance; but then, as Zoe thought, he was so very weak, that any show of deep or strong emotion was neither likely nor desirable. He seemed far more inclined — but that, too, was but natural — to descant, as he grew stronger, rather upon *his* own annoyances and sorrows than upon hers. He would talk for hours, as convalescence came to be confirmed, of his own heavy misfortunes — of the defalcation of his friends — and of the villany of the two Northern sharpers, into whose hands he had, through his own generous trustfulness (such were the words he used), so fatally fallen.

Zoe listened in sympathizing silence, contriving, though with difficulty, to edge in here and there some few sentences of her own, by which the egotistical invalid became at last aware that the marriage of his daughter was invalid, and that by Seymour's aid, *he* might find some means, not only of obtaining aid on his own account, but also of avenging himself on his detested enemy.

It was the day succeeding that which witnessed the arrival of Zoe at the house in Canal Street, where, in a room adjoining her father's, she had taken up her abode. A dreary and unwholesome-looking apartment it was, scant of furniture, with carpetless floor, and sloping ceiling. But cheerless as it seemed, we must

for awhile leave Zoe to bear, as best she might, her temporary discomforts, whilst we explain to the reader, in a few words, some events bearing upon the lives of the humbler actors in our story.

When Braddell, having concluded to his satisfaction the "operation," which more than beggared the once prosperous Louisianian planter, he, having obtained a decree of the Courts, which consigned all the worldly goods and effects of Jaspar Gordon to himself, and Mr. John Lincoln Morse, took summary possession of the house in New Orleans, together with all its rich and luxurious appurtenances. Into that house he established, as its housekeeper and care-taker, the coloured woman Angélique — Angélique, whose offices, with regard to the duties she owed to Morse, were not confined to those ostensible ones; and whose daily talents, exercised in the city, as a lady's hair-dresser, were rendered lucrative to her new owner by the skill of the yellow woman's practised hand. The season for the profitable transfer of residences in New Orleans had not yet arrived, and the Speculators, as the reader must be well aware, not being given to unnecessary expenditure, it resulted that Angélique was left in that large and now desolate house, with no fellow-servant to bear her company, or to break the tedium of the passing hours.

Had it been in her power, the unprincipled slave-woman would have filled those dreary, echoing rooms with female friends of her own race and colour, and with "white gentlemen" — young storekeepers, and well-got-up city dandies, who would have been only

too ready to while away their idle hours in easy pleasures; and in *sans gêne têtes-à-têtes* on those luxurious sofas and divans. But this was not to be, for John Link's orders were most strict, that strangers should not enter even within the garden gate, and Angy knew too well her tyrant's temper, and his erratic habits, to venture in that respect in disobedience to his command.

Times were now sadly changed for the pleasure-loving *coiffeuse* — sadly changed since the days of her easy service under the kind-hearted and indolent creole; for although she had obtained one object of her ambition, and was at last the acknowledged mistress of a white man, neither pleasure nor profit had been the result of her success.

Truth to say — and it is a fact which no one who has followed her evil courses, will regret — Angy was a miserable woman. Miserable, inasmuch as she was subjected to the caprices and caresses of a villain whose low sensuality and actual delight in giving pain rendered her life a daily and a nightly penance.

It was only when quite secure — and these occasions were of rare occurrence — of Morse's certain and continued absence — that Angy could venture on an indulgence in any of her favourite pastimes; and often, even when amusing herself at places of public amusement, and at the Quadroon balls in which her soul had once so eagerly delighted, qualms of fear — those of conscience were entirely unknown to one who had been reared from infancy in the vile slime, and in the degrading atmosphere which on many plantations

is the portion of the slave — qualms of fear, I say, would often turn her sick with dread, lest during her absence, her brutal owner might return and find her absent.

In appearance Angélique was greatly altered for the worse, since the old days before Zoe's mock marriage and departure. She was no longer the sleek, well-conditioned slave-girl, with her yellow skin, bright and polished, her crisped, rippling hair, glossy with oil and the daily brushing, by which she strove, but strove in vain, to make it straight and curlless as the long tresses of the hated white woman. Such was Angy in the days when she had leisure to be spiteful, and opportunity to carry — with what success we have seen — her evil designs into execution. But the régime employed by Mr. John Link Morse was not calculated to increase either the personal or mental attractions of those dependent on his vicious and tyrannic will; so Angy's plumpness, which was her chief personal attraction, lessened day by day, the salient bones denoting, with the hollow cough that sounded from her chest — the fact that dissipation, a changeful climate, and it might be the want of wholesome nourishment, had entailed upon the wretched woman that last, worst enemy of her hapless race — consumption.

Only one of Mr. Gordon's household servants, who had come into Morse's possession, had escaped the penalty of the "block" — or, in other words, all the others, male and female, with the exception of Angélique, had been knocked down at the tap of the auctioneer's hammer to the highest bidder. Far and

wide had they been scattered, regardless of family ties, or home predilections; and amongst the rest — the faithful Sam, being a bachelor, was perhaps the least worthy of commiseration, had been purchased by Dr. Lane, and carried off by that gentleman to his plantation on the Mississippi.

The close of the month saw the return of Dr. Lane to the city, and with him came Sam, who had already become, by reason of his good temper, his industry, and above all his unfailing cheerfulness, an especial favourite with the doctor's family. Now it must be confessed that the said Sam was nothing loth to see again the wilful Angy — his whilom fellow-servant during the palmy days when, in Mr. Gordon's liberally-conducted *ménage*, the domestics held high revel both in the gay town-house, and on pleasant Orange Creek Plantation; for the truth was that the constant sight of Angy's charms had wrought some havoc in the susceptible heart of the sable coachman, and though his esteem for her was at zero, he had not been able to witness her ill-doings without many a jealous pang, and not a few futile efforts to lead her towards a better life.

Sam's first visit on his return to the city was paid to Angélique. And if his sensitive feelings received a shock on seeing the change in the slave-girl's appearance, he was, on the other hand, consoled by the unusual warmth of the welcome she accorded him. Angy was sitting alone in her kitchen, eating her mid-day meal (a repast which consisted of nothing more strengthening than corn-bread soaked in molasses)

when Sam, heralding his approach by a sonorous cough, displayed his beaming countenance between the iron railings which surrounded the garden.

Angélique started nervously from her seat on hearing the familiar sound, and recognizing the well-known features of her quondam admirer.

"Why, Sam," she said, and her yellow face grew flushed with agitation; "sure, boy, it isn't you; you kinder grain streaked me — you did. I didn't 'spect you, that's a fact."

"But you'll open the gate for me all de same," Sam said. "And Angy, what's come over you? You looks solomncolly as the sun on a tombstone; you're not riled with me. *I* havn't done nuffin, I haven't."

"No, you havn't done nuffin," broke in Angy, with a spice of her old spirit — "but everything's gone ugly, and I've been sick a long spell — and Massa Link's a brute — and I'm blessed if I wouldn't rather starve on a rice plantation, and work eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, than lib with the cust Yankee driver, who cut me across the face only a week ago wid his thick riding-whip. Only see, Sam, how he marked me." And Angy displayed a dark blue mark upon her cheek to the exasperated Sam, who, still standing outside the rails, clenched his strong fists in impotent wrath.

"I'd bring you in here if I could," the girl went on to say; "but he never lets no people come to hum — the mean, great ugly crittur!"

"Well he was that always," Sam said, with a re-

proachful sigh; "and I could nebber see wid all your broughtens-up, how you could look at 'im. I used to wonder at you, Angy, for he war tarnation ugly, wid a nose you could have hung a tea-kettle on."

"Dat'll do now — stop dar. If you speak anudder word, you may bake me into hoe-cakes if ever I look at yer again."

Sam was silenced by her hasty tones — silenced and angered — but the latter feeling was of short duration, for Angélique, with a display of penitence totally at variance with her former hasty words, said, while the large tears chased one another down her cheeks,

"I often tink, Sam, dat I've been a foolish gal, and that Madam Clarice and Miss Zoe was a deal better dan dis Yankee fellar."

"Better! I should tink so," cried Sam, indignantly. "Madame Clarice, she an angel now in heaven, sitting at de golden gate — and good Miss Zoe — Ah, Angy, if you'd seen her at the last day afore she went away, crying by her blessed mother's tomb — and putting flowers — lubly ones they was — on little Freddy's grave."

"Was it she dat put 'em there?" asked Angélique, impetuously, while her bosom heaved, and she clasped her thin hands together convulsively. "Say dat again, Sam; say it was her, and by de Great Jehovah — and as He may take pity on a wicked sinner at de judgment-day, I will tell you something. No — not to you, but to Massa Seymour his own self — which will make Miss Zoe bless de day when she remembered dat de wicked coloured girl had once a lilly chile to lub."

CHAPTER XLV.

"Oh, what a thin partition
Doth shut out from the curious world the knowledge
Of evil deeds that have been done in darkness!"

"My fears are windows,
Through which all eyes seem gazing."

As Zoe confidently believed would be the case, Seymour lost not a moment in following her to the Crescent City. Of course he was obliged to wait till such time as the departure of another Train would enable him to put his design in execution. For the gods, who have ever inexorably refused to "annihilate both time and space," in order to "make two lovers happy," were not likely to relent in the matter of steam, and in favour of this ardent young Louisianian gentleman.

As was the case with Zoe, Seymour's sensations on reading her few hurried lines were a compound of delight, self-reproach, and well-to-be-accounted-for alarm. There was joy indeed in the reflection that she was free from the imaginary ties which bound her to her villanous persecutor, added to keen self-accusation for his own absence from his post; for had he been at hand to answer at her call, the girl he loved would not have set forth unprotected on a journey, the dangers of which filled his soul with apprehensions for her safety.

Full of these thoughts, and multiplying as he went a thousandfold the perils of the way, Seymour's relief and satisfaction, when he found that Zoe had reached New Orleans, and was under such protection as it was in Gordon's power to bestow, can easily be imagined.

The girl, in her somewhat confused despatch, had happily not forgotten one grand essential to their meeting — namely, her father's address in Canal Street; and it was therefore to the house, aye, — and to the very room, where the invalid and his young daughter were talking together of his approaching advent, — that Seymour at once betook himself.

Zoe showed no violent emotion, either of surprise or joy, when her lover, after knocking gently at the door, stepped on tiptoe to the bedside. He "trod delicately," not from any especial liking to, or consideration for, the sick man, but because the lady of his love was there — pale, sad, and anxious, mourning, it might be, by the dying bed of her weak, frivolous father. That this was not the case he felt assured, when Gordon, stretching a feeble hand out from the bed-clothes, said he was glad to see him; while Zoe, with her sweet, shy smile, crept nearer to him; so near that he could place his arm around her pliant form, and draw her closer still.

And then, for it was clear that measures for Zoe's safety could not be too promptly taken, they began to concert together schemes for the furthering of that important object. It was scarcely possible for one man to entertain for another a deeper and more well-earned

contempt than that which filled Charles Seymour's breast whilst listening to Jaspar Gordon's shifts and subterfuges. Nor was the feeling of repulsion lessened when, through the ugly chaos made up of equivocations designed to hide his long-continued selfish meannesses, Seymour gleaned some rays of truth at last; and saw, with a quickness sharpened by apprehension for her he so fondly loved, that the *law* gave Morse the right to claim the peerless Zoe as his *slave*.

After the foreclosing of the mortgages on his estates, decrees had been pronounced in Court which rendered Jaspar Gordon liable for everything which he possessed, and — her manumission papers not being forthcoming — that *everything* of course included his slave and daughter, the beautiful Octaroon.

What were in this terrible emergency the best measures to be taken? To purchase Zoe of her villainous owner, at any price, however exorbitant, was the first thought which occurred to Seymour; but then it might be that Morse, taking advantage of his weakness for the slave, would ask a "fancy" price, one, too, which it might exceed the power of the lover to produce. Gordon also threw out some objections to any wanton or lavish expenditure of money, which might be far better employed than in enriching one so worthless and altogether ruffianly as John Link Morse.

Zoe was not present at the conference during which the delicate subject of her barter was handled between her lover and the whilom Southern slave-owner. Her proud spirit would have sorely chafed to hear that the

loss of her purchase-money would so straiten the means of the generous-hearted Seymour, that it might take many years of strict economy before the consequences of his uncalculating liberality would cease to be remembered. Happily, however, for the chances of a decision being arrived at, Zoe — it was nearly dusk, and some medicine was required for her father — had, unknown to the two busily-engaged gentlemen, betaken herself, with her thick veil lowered, and her large brown cloak drawn closely round her, to the nearest store where “drugs and chemicals” could be procured for Mr. Gordon’s ailments.

She had not been long absent before the preliminaries of the future proceedings were decided on. There was an English merchant vessel anchored within a stone’s-throw off the Levée; and in her — she was bound to sail for Liverpool on the morrow — Seymour nothing doubted that, by an unsparing distribution of golden Eagles, to say nothing of the mighty auxiliaries they would have on board, in the shape of honest, liberty-loving hearts, a passage might be ensured for himself and Zoe to the Old World.

“And, my dear sir, when you are all right again, we shall be happy to see you once more amongst us,” said the lover, whose heart, in its overflowing happiness, warmed even to that weak-minded sensualist. “I shall not be a rich man, either in France or England; but I shall, I trust, have enough to make Zoe happy, and that is all I crave for.”

The object of this unselfish remark entered unob-

served as he was speaking, and stealing softly behind him, laid her hand trustingly upon his shoulder. He turned round hastily, and looked fondly on the lovely face, beaming with its new-found happiness.

"Child, where have you been?" he asked anxiously, seeing that she wore her veil and bonnet. "It is as much as that most precious life of yours is worth to leave the house. Promise me that till I come again you will not stir."

The girl laughed lightly.

"What can you fear?" she said. "For that horrid man — so I am told by Dr. Lane, is gone a journey into Arkansas; and there is no one else who —"

She stopped suddenly, and Seymour noticed that the colour called up by exercise faded from her cheek.

"Who?" he repeated. "What do you mean, my darling, and why do you look pale and frightened?"

"Nothing — indeed nothing," she replied. "Only there was a man, whose name I don't remember, but who was on board the boat, and knew *him* — Zoe could never bring herself to say Link Morse's name — "at least so Dr. Corsten told me; and he —"

"Well, what of him?" broke in Gordon, querulously. "You mean Braddell, of course. Speak out then. What about him?"

"Only that I can't help thinking — but I may be wrong, for it was nearly dark, and I only, that I remember, saw him twice — but I can't help thinking that I met this Braddell, as you call him, in the street to-night, and —"

But she was stopped by Seymour starting from his chair.

"Stay here," he cried, "and for your life don't move. I shall go no farther than the 'Royal Lily,' and return in twenty minutes, or less. Fasten the door after me with bolt and key; and Zoe, precious one," he whispered, "be sure you open it to none but me, and only when you hear three knocks struck thus against the panel."

He suited the action to the word by giving three taps in a peculiar fashion on the door; and then, after snatching one hurried kiss, he rushed away, descending the steep winding stairs two steps at a time, until he reached the narrow entrance-hall.

He never looked either to the right hand or the left, after he emerged into the street; and therefore failed to notice, watching the abode of Zoe and her father with eager eyes, a tall and burly man, wrapt in a large Mexican poncho, who during the last fifteen minutes had stood there, half concealed by the projecting angle of a neighbouring house.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"No more alone through the world's wilderness,

No more companionless

Where solitude is like despair."

It was striking eight by the old cathedral clock when Seymour, hastening at headlong pace towards the Levée, felt himself jostled by some person running at an equal rate in a contrary direction. There was no time for explanation or apology, and Seymour was pursuing his way as rapidly as before, when he felt his arm unceremoniously seized, and, looking round, he perceived, by the light of a gas-lamp under which he was standing, that the individual guilty of this breach of good manners was no less a personage than Mr. Gordon's *ci-devant* black coachman, Sam.

For a moment the two men looked at one another in surprise, and then Seymour, after a passing expression of goodwill, was again rushing on towards the river, when Sam said emphatically,

"You not go dat way at all, Massa Seymour; you go to Quadroon ball at de Globe, and talk to Angy — Angy got sometink good to say to you. Sometink," he whispered, standing on his toes, in order to be nearer Seymour's ear, "sometink about Missy Zoe's papers — it is, sare." And having delivered this hint in a manner singularly oratorical and sententious, Sam waited for the result of his information.

At first, Seymour felt inclined to treat the whole affair as a trick — not of Sam's, whom he knew to be honest and single-hearted, but of the coquettish Angy's, who, he was well aware, would go considerable lengths to entrap an eligible white partner to the balls in question. At first, then, he felt disposed to pay no heed to the suggestions of his sable friend; but a few more minutes' attention to the latter's eager explanations altered Seymour's first impression of the matter; and, after a moment given to thought, he, after liberally rewarding Sam for his intelligence, pursued his course towards the Levée even more rapidly, if possible, than before.

As he walked on with long, impatient strides, his mind was being made up as to his future course to be pursued. That he would go to the Quadroon ball at the Globe — which place, according to Sam, was the only one where Angy would consent to meet him — was a measure, unpleasant though it was, soon decided on by Seymour; but in the meantime there was business to be done at the Wharf, which it would be hardly prudent to neglect; for, after all, Angélique, who was the incarnation of deception and trickery, might not in reality be in possession of the all-important papers, and in that case the necessity would still remain as urgent as before for the unemancipated slave girl's immediate flight from the hated city, where

"The curse of Cain
Might fall like a flail on the garnered grain,
And strike her to the earth!"

But while Charles Seymour stood on the deck of the "Royal Lily," making arrangements with a bluff, red-faced skipper for the passage-money and for other items requisite to Miss Gordon's accommodation and comfort during the voyage, other heads were at work, and actively too, in circumventing all his plans. For one great, and it might be fatal, mistake in Angy's calculations had been made; and instead of being, as the woman imagined, far away in the lawless State of Arkansas, John Link Morse was at that very moment in New Orleans (having arrived there but an hour before Sam's interview with his housekeeper), and had already been informed by Braddell of Zoe's reappearance in the city.

The two men were walking backwards and forwards in front of the tall house in Canal Street, in the uppermost story of which their intended victim sat in her lonely chamber, with a radiant brow and a heart so filled up to the brim with happiness, that (dark as the world had been before, and full of wearying sorrows), there was now an atmosphere of such clear joy around her, that, like the imprisoned bird let loose to try its pinions in the summer air, there seemed, to use the poet's words,

"Nothing on earth, or sea, or air,
Too bold, too bright, too great, too gay,
For spirits like hers to dare."

In a few hours — hours which would pass so quickly in thoughts of Seymour's love and faithfulness — she would no longer be alone — no longer feel that if in

this cold and heartless world, where, cold and heartless though it is, *some* have found friends and sympathizers, *she* was doomed to a solitude — the more oppressive from her keen yearning after love and tenderness. But this was over now, and on the earth Zoe could think of none to envy — none whose “prime of bliss” she could compare with hers; for Seymour was at last her own, and she — ah! there was no danger hovering near her now — for so great and powerful did she deem him, that every wrong that slavery heaps upon its victims seemed lightened by his presence; and even the sight of the base man to whom she owed her wretchedness could scarce have called up in her mind an actual fear that he could work her harm.

It was a pleasant thought just then that she could come to Charley Seymour's arms in all her white-robed innocence. The “brand” upon her brow was one that time could not efface, but for eternity the stainless raiment of her purity would be hers; for she had passed unscathed through the hot furnace-blast of fierce temptation, and could with a meek but hopeful heart lift up her pure hands to God.

Seymour, when, on his return, he looked upon her peaceful face, wondered a little at its tranquil joyousness, and could (but for that very calm) have almost fancied that Sam the coachman had been beforehand with him with the news he brought — namely, that their hurried flight might, even at the eleventh hour, be a needless act.

CHAPTER XLVII.

"Woman, in her deepest degradation,
Holds something sacred, something undefiled,
Some pledge and keepsake of her higher nature;
And, like the diamond in the dark, retains
Some quenchless gleam of the celestial light."

ON the night of the first of October, 1860, the large room in the Globe Hotel, where the second-class Quadroon balls were habitually held, was crowded with visitors of both sexes. The weather, although the dangerous yellow-fever season was fast wearing out, was still warm enough to make the coloured ladies and their American partners rejoice that the widely-opened doors and windows admitted a free current of air through the already overfilled ball-room.

Dancing (it was a very *laissez-aller* species of indulgence in that popular pastime) had been carried on since the hour of ten, at which time the signal for the commencement of the amusement had been given, and the doors were thrown open to the pleasure-loving public.

Angélique, true to the promise she had made to meet Charles Seymour at the Globe, and then and there to make such amends as lay in her power for the mischief she had wrought, betook herself betimes to the place of rendezvous. She was dressed as became her position as mistress to a rich white man — that is to say, she had loaded her person with showy finery, and hung such strings of mimic gold and jewels round her neck and arms, that as she entered through the doorway, her appearance in such wondrous "bra-

verie," caused the low, coloured rabble round the entrance to shout in loud applause.

Angy had, as I before remarked, lost a considerable portion of the charms which, but a few months before, had caused her to be sought for as a partner in the dance, as often as any of the fairer frail ones who came to parade their attractions in those haunts of vice. But though fallen from her pride of beauty, Angy was not altogether a young woman to be overlooked, and she had already dashed through more than one half-frantic galop — the while the clanging music of a loud brass band sounded through the open doors and windows — before the man whose entrance she had never for a moment ceased to watch for, made his appearance in the room.

Seymour, for the reader need not be told that he it was on whom the coloured woman's gaze was fixed, stood for a moment looking round, as though in search of some particular individual in the thronged saloon. He did not seek long in vain, for Angy, her dance being over and the music hushed, advanced towards him with her partner, whom she, without ceremony, dismissed. This done — and no fine lady in the city could have performed the duty better — she took Seymour's unoffered arm, and led him to the place where refreshments were being served. There were no strong drinks provided there for the coloured beauties, but only lemonade, iced water, and suchlike harmless beverages, for their delectation and refreshment.

"You have something to say to me?" were Sey-

mour's opening words. He tried to speak them calmly, but his heart beat fast with eager expectation.

"Well, I had," was the coquettishly sounding reply; "but I 'xpect you'll say a civil word or two before I tell you. I habn't seen you in the city for a long spell, and—"

"Come, Angy, this won't do," said Seymour trying to call a smile up to his lips. "We are old friends, you know, and besides, fine as you are (and he touched the great glass purple beads upon her wrists), a little help sometimes doesn't come amiss to any of us."

"It isn't for that," she cried, interrupting him vehemently. "It is for her — only for her, mind — only for Miss Zoe! I hated her once, as much as any woman ever hated man or d—l; but now I'd like to make it up to her, for — for, I b'lieve, I'm dying — gwine to jine my little Freddy, and it was she — I never knew till now who 'twas — that put the flowers on his grave, the bright Mayday I found 'em there."

They were standing, while she spoke, in the midst of a group of curious listeners, so Seymour drew her gently to a corner where they had less chance of being overheard, and said, soothingly,

"Time enough, poor soul, to think of death and dismal things. It may be there are happy days, and a far better life, before you. Only help me to restore, if it lies in your power, the papers which that villain Morse stole from Miss Gordon, and I swear to you, that at any price, I will purchase you of your present master, and then let you choose your home where and with whom you will."

"You're berry good, Massa Seymour," the woman

faltered. "But it's little use I'd make of freedom now. I'd like though to see *him* hanged, that I would," she added, with vindictive hate, "but there's no such luck, I calculate, a coming yet awhile. I've got the papers wid me;" and, as she said the words, she drew a packet from her breast, and hardly had she deposited them in Seymour's outstretched hands, when a sudden blow upon her wrist caused her to scream aloud with pain.

"Tarnation!" shouted a voice, which she recognized at once as that of her detested owner. "Tarnation! what are you about, you cussed infernal nigger? you're coming the large 'licks' now, I calculate." And Morse, with the never-failing palmetto hat stuck defiantly on his head, glared fire and fury at Angélique and her companion. At the first symptoms of a "row," a crowd had closed in round the disputants, and already ominous whispers were passing from one to another of the wondering spectators.

"My," said a handsome mulatto girl, forcing her way into a good place, for the gratification of her curiosity, "My, but there'll be knifing there, I reckon. Hasn't he got his dander up? He looks awful ugly;" and as she said the words, she sidled up to Seymour, whose handsome face, shaded by the gold-brown, waving hair, whose hue she especially admired, had already, during his short stay in the room, attracted her attention.

Meanwhile Morse had laid a brutal hand on Angélique, and his hard fingers closing on her uncovered arm, gave her a foretaste of the tortures about to be her portion. Instinctively the wretched woman, in the extremity of her pain and terror, appealed in wild,

imploring accents to Charles Seymour for protection; and he — was it likely that, with his darling's claim to freedom safe in his possession, and owing all to that poor trembling sinner, she would seek his aid in vain?

If there were men in that assemblage who deemed the rights of a slaveowner over his human property too sacred to be interfered with, Charles Seymour was not of their number; for, exasperated by the sight of Zoe's hated enemy, and full of gratitude to the hapless victim of the coward's brutality, he, without a thought of future consequences, aimed a blow with his clenched fist at Morse, which sent him reeling back amongst the crowd.

It was no child's touch upon his cheek — that stroke which left its mark for many a week where it had fallen — but heavy though it was, Morse, in his mad fury, felt the pain no more than if a fly had settled on his face, and searching, with true "rowdy" instinct, for the ever-ready bowie knife, would have avenged his wrongs with one sharp, well-directed thrust, had not his intention been frustrated by those who stood around.

Seymour had friends amongst that motley crew, whose aid was more efficient than the admiring slave-girl's screams of fear; and when the ruffian raised his hand to strike, a dozen men stood forth and held him fast, whilst the young Southerner remembering, even in that time of wild excitement, that for Zoe's sake his life was precious, left, after some hurried words of thanks to his preservers, that scene of murderous gaiety, and with Zoe's precious papers held tightly in his hand, walked swiftly away in the direction of Canal Street.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"I oft have thought
That could we, by some spell of magic, change
The world and its inhabitants to stone,
In the same attitude they now are in,
What fearful glances downward might we cast
Into the hollow chasms of human life!"

"SLICK, Sam," cried Angy. "You cut away as if a catamount was at your heels, and tell the doctor all about Miss Zoe and the papers."

She had escaped, after Seymour's exit from the ball-room, and panting with agitation, had found the faithful Sam watching at the door for a sight of his repentant friend.

"But what hab I to tell him?" asked Sam, looking sorely puzzled at the order given him.

"Ah! go away, you stoopid fellah. Tell him dat Hell Morse is rale mad and ugly now, and dat dare'll be mischief done if he don't keep an eye on Massa Seymour and Miss Zoe."

"But dis chile don't see," began poor Sam, scratching his woolly head despairingly; for he was full of anxiety for his kind friends and patrons, and Angy's half-explanations were anything but satisfactory.

"Don't see — dat's nonsense. You don't need to see — you jez do what I tell you, and no more." She took Sam's broad black hand in hers, as she concluded her peremptory command, and held it for a moment

fast. "I'm gwine to die myself, Sam, berry soon. I habn't a month's breath left in me. Look at dis blood, Sam — it's as red as dere's is that break our hearts." And as she said the words she spread before his face a coarse calico handkerchief, stained with a crimson tinge. "Look here — I cough dat way all through the day and night; I've got one comfort though, I'll cheat that scoundrel Morse of his two thousand dollars. He could have clared dat for me awhile ago, but now I've fixed his flint, and he'll only have poor Angy's bones and cusses."

She laughed — it was an unnatural display of merriment which made Sam's blood run cold within him, and then — silent and gloomy she turned away — taking, as her companion thought, the way towards the burial-ground.

Late as was the hour — for eleven o'clock had struck — Seymour did not hesitate to knock at Mr. Gordon's door, in the hope that his triumph might be shared by her whose happiness was for ever bound up in his own.

Jaspar Gordon was still awake, but he answered Seymour's summons for admittance sulkily, and in the voice of an ill-used invalid whose slumbers have not met with their due meed of respectful consideration. The room was dimly lighted by one solitary candle, and near the table on which it stood Zoe was seated, with her lustrous head — on which the rays were faintly shimmering — bent over a book that rested on her lap.

She started at her lover's entrance, and the faint colour rose to her cheek.

"My darling," he whispered, and there was a strange thrill of exultation in his voice — "My darling — I have returned at last, and not come empty-handed. See — here is my wedding-present." He placed the papers Angy had surrendered to him in Zoe's hands, and after explaining when, and how they came into his possession, he added in a tone of tender triumph — "You are free at last, my treasure! Free as the birds that carol in the sky! Free as the balmy breezes that soon, please God, shall waft us from this doomed and blighted land."

But a short while ago Zoe would have received the news he brought her with all the wild enthusiasm of delight which Seymour loved to read upon her eloquent face; but now — now, when her cup of happiness seemed filled up to the brim — there was no room for one more drop in the sweet, overflowing measure.

She raised her loving eyes to his, and said in her low, loving tones,

"How can I pay you for such gifts, dear love? How show my life-long gratitude for your unfailing offices of kindness? Ah, Charles, I am *too* happy! Life at last seems opening out before me in such a flash of joy and brightness, that I have been praying that I be not dazzled by the flood of light."

She would have said more, perhaps, but for the passionate fire which gleamed out from her lover's eyes; and, to escape its burning influence, she hid her

face upon his breast, while he with loving hands, that trembled in his deep emotion, smoothed the bright luxuriant hair, and pressed his lips upon its shining braids.

Sleep — already on its way to Mr. Gordon's pillow — had closed the eyes of the invalid during that short whispered colloquy; so they seemed quite alone in their deep, trusting love, with only One unslumbering Eye to watch and guard them from their own hearts' fierce temptation.

Suddenly, in the midst of a stillness only broken by the beating of their quickened pulses, a sound of heavy footsteps hurrying up the stairs aroused them from their trance of passion, and in another moment the door was thrown violently open, and Morse, followed by his satellite Braddell, burst into the room.

"Here you are!" yelled the former; "and, by Gawd, if I don't sling you into h— now, may I be —. What! yer sparking with my wife here, are you? Precious cool, I reckon, aren't you now? But yer a'most used up, I guess. Here, Braddell, take the nigger gal away. She's a nice lot, she is. I say, come along, you —" and he used an expression too coarse for repetition here — "and behave yourself, or you'll get a touch of the cowhide, I calculate."

During this speech, Seymour had hastily risen, and stood confronting the insolent speaker; while Zoe, pale as death, but with brave resolution flashing from her eyes, was encircled by his protecting arm. The situation — he could not disguise it from himself — was

one of danger, for he was totally unarmed; and Gordon, who was weak from the effects of fever, was powerless to aid him. One glance he turned towards the bed, and saw that its occupant, roused by Morse's entrance, had risen to a sitting posture, and with chattering teeth was making fruitless efforts to speak. Then Seymour, aware how terrible would, in the event of a conflict, be the odds against him, resolved, sorely against the grain, to temporize with the enemy, and answered, with a fruitless effort at composure,

"Mr. Morse, this intrusion on your part is totally unauthorized; nor can you, as you must be well aware, claim this lady as your wife. Before Miss Gordon left New York, she ascertained that, being yourself a married man, the ceremony which bound her to you was an illegal one, and that —"

But here he was interrupted by a roar of laughter from Morse, in which expression of amusement he was joined by Braddell, who, after it had subsided, said jeeringly,

"Why, stranger, what an everlasting coon you must have been to believe in that 'ere mouthful of moonshine! Where was you raised now, to think the squire would conclude to u-nite himself with a coloured gal? She looks uncommon bright though, the crittur does, and she'd realize ten thousand dollars, and that's a fact, to-morrow."

As he said the coarse, insulting words, the two men, as if moved by a simultaneous impulse, advanced a step towards the girl, who stood there with her noble

head thrown back, as if daring them to lay a sacrilegious hand upon the form that Seymour loved; whilst he, with a heart beating now with the savage fury of a wild beast at bay, released his betrothed from his grasp, and, flinging her behind him, prepared for the coming contest.

Braddell was foremost in the attack. He was a powerfully-built New Englander, with broad massive shoulders, and a neck thick and muscular as a bull's; but, formidable as was the man's size and strength, no sooner had he come within arm's length of the shrinking girl, than Seymour, who had learned in the Parisian schools the science of self-defence, felled him to the ground with one well-directed blow, and then, with his keen eyes fixed upon the slighter and more cowardly ruffian, he stood ready for what might follow.

"Brave heart!" cried Zoe, her passionate blood on fire with excitement, and already confident of victory for the man she idolized.

Brave heart! Ah! brave indeed, and chivalrous as brave; but, alas! the beatings in that noble breast were numbered, for Death, alas! was taking part against him, and the fatal arrow was already sped which was to still Charley Seymour's pulse for ever!

With a savage howl, and a malediction awful to hear from human lips, Morse saw his companion fall, and then — it was the affair of one short dreadful moment — the loud report of a pistol sounded through the room, and a heavy fall announced that the deadly weapon had done its hateful work!

CHAPTER XLIX.

"The air
Is changed to vapours, such as the dead breathe
In charnel pits! Pah! I am choked! There creeps
A clinging, black, contaminating mist
Around me."

HE was quite dead! The ball from Morse's revolver had struck him on the forehead, and he had died without a pang or groan. Zoe, when she saw her lover fall, neither screamed nor fainted, but stood over him with her tall form erect, and with eyes in which there shone the fire of incipient madness, glaring with frantic menace at his murderer.

For a moment Morse stood irresolute, and as if struck with consternation at his own daring act, for Seymour was no obscure and penniless "coloured man," but a gentleman well known and much considered, so that his murder would too surely make a stir and noise even in the City, where nightly brawls and murderous assaults are too common to excite much wonder or indignation. For a moment, then, he stood irresolute, but was roused to action by Braddell, who having quickly regained his feet, laid a heavy hand upon his fellow-ruffian's shoulder, with the remark that they'd "better take the girl away, and then make tracks for Texas — Arkansas — anywhere, in short, till the affair should be blown over and forgotten."

"'Spose there ain't no use to call in the doctor," he whispered, taking refuge in "chaff" from the uneasy feelings which the presence of death had called up even in his guilt-hardened breast.

The words were said in jest, but were answered—curiously enough — by the unexpected appearance of the very individual of whom he had spoken; for Sam had performed his mission well and speedily, but, Alas! too late to save the precious life of kind, frank-hearted Charley Seymour; and Dr. Lane, little as he understood what had actually taken place, saw enough in Sam's account to excite, not only his own fears, but those of Davenport Seymour, who was a guest at his house, for the safety of Zoe and her lover.

There was no time to spare for seeking reinforcements, so the two men, with Sam as an auxiliary, in case of need, hastened at their utmost speed to Canal Street, reaching, as we have shown, the scene of crime and treachery a moment only after the enactment of as dark a tragedy as ever disgraced the bloody annals of the vice-stained city.

Scarcely, as I before said, had the brutal jest escaped from Braddell's lips, when the sounds of many footsteps on the stairs caused the two men to pause in their accursed work of crime and violence. There was but one means of exit from the room, and but small chance of safety, should the intruders be, as they feared, numerous: so, for a passing instant, during which

"Each coward looked into his neighbour's face,
To see if it were deathlike as his own,"

Morse, feeling that in darkness lay their surest prospect of escaping, extinguished the light which was burning low in the socket of the candlestick; and, abandoning for the time all idea of recapturing the slave-girl, made ready for the rush for life, which both foresaw might soon be necessary. To describe what, in the now dense obscurity followed on the entrance of Zoe's defenders, would be impossible. There was for an instant or two a strange bewildering silence — then a confused noise of hurried whispers — a feeling about for forms and substances in that impenetrable gloom — and at the end, a "charge" against the half-opened door by men — strong and resolute, forcing their way violently, as if eager to escape.

"Fetch a light, Sam! Run, for the love of God," cried Davenport. "There may be murder done here ere we can see our way to hinder it."

As he shouted out the impetuous order, he was thrust aside with a force which sent him reeling into the centre of the room, while at the same moment a fearful scream — one of those cries of anguish rarely heard, but which tell a tale of madness and despair, rent the narrow space around them.

Heavens! What a shriek it was, and how it startled those strong men who heard it! The light came at last — a feeble, flickering light, but strong enough to show to those who looked upon it that most awful spectacle. No one thought of Gordon then — though even he, lying upon his bed in strong convulsive shiverings, might have claimed some share of

pity, had not drearier sights monopolized the whole attention of those horror-stricken men.

There were no enemies to contend with now; for whosoever it had been whose hand had dealt the fatal wound he was, for the moment, safe from merited punishment, while upon the ground, stretched cold and stiffening with the congealing life-blood on his marble brow, lay all that now remained of Charley Seymour. Zoe had placed the head upon her lap, and sitting on the floor, played (while a strange smile distorted her white lips) with his brown, clustering hair. Her fingers were moist and *sticky* with the blood that oozed out from the death-wound, but still she smiled and murmured — for with the wild, heart-rending scream she uttered when the kiss pressed to his clay-cold lips revealed the truth — her reason fled. And God, in His great mercy, steeped for a while her senses in oblivion.

CHAPTER L.

"Moon came, moon came, evening then, night descended,
And we prolonged calm talk beneath the sphere
Of the calm moon — when suddenly was blended
With our repose a nameless sense of fear.

The scene was changed, and away, away, away!
We sped."

THREE months had glided by since the occurrence of the events recorded in the last chapter, and all the actors in our story, with the exception of Angélique, were still pursuing, in the land of the living, their daily course of pleasure, business, endurance — whatever, in short, was the part given them to enact in this world of short, but sharp probation.

In a small, but neatly-furnished apartment in the outskirts of New Orleans, Jaspar Gordon was, from the open window, impatiently endeavouring to catch the meaning of a whispered conversation carried on between two women, who were standing together beneath the verandah.

The setting sun was shining on the face of the elder of the two — a *grey*, passionless face, it was the same (but older still, and calmer in its dim, religious purity) which, in the days gone by, bent with poor Clarice over the dying bed of the old negress Judith. Into that face, melancholy, though youthful eyes were gazing now, for sympathy and love, and Zoe (for she it was on whom her father's eyes were fixed) held in her own the nun's thin, wasted hands, feeling almost a daughter's love for that meek, holy woman.

"You have done well to-day, *mon enfant*," the latter was saying to her young disciple. "You have laboured in the vineyard with a willing heart, and He who has promised that those who give to the poor but a cup of cold water in His name shall not go unrewarded, will bestow on you, in return, the blessing of peace."

"It is long in coming, Sister Marie," sighed poor Zoe; "so long in coming, that I sometimes fear —"

"Fear nothing, child," broke in the nun, "and strive to see the hand of God in all things. It is not for us to choose our lot in life, for He wisely ordereth all things for our good. Take courage, then, and falter not, for He will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He will gather the lambs into His fold, and keep you in His perfect peace."

Zoe listened to the sacred truths, quoted for her comfort by one whose hopes it might be truly said, were fixed on Heaven. But even as she listened, there was a yearning in her heart for earthly comfort — the vague and uncomprehended yearning it was, of one whose youth and vigorous sap of life had enabled her brave spirit to throw off, in part, its heavy burden, and to rise up from her trance of madness and despair, pale indeed, and altered, but resolute still to do her woman's duty in the narrow path, which, sad and weary, she must henceforth tread alone.

Very lovely was poor Chérie still, but with a chastened, holier beauty. She had not been abandoned in her hour of bitter trial, inasmuch as Davenport Seymour, for her sake as well as for that of him whom

they had loved and lost, had watched over the poor broken-hearted Octaroon with all a brother's care; whilst Dr. Lane, aided by the efficient and untiring Sister Marie, had, by God's blessing on their labours of affection, brought her at last in safety through her long and dangerous malady.

During Zoe's illness, Mr. Burns had died suddenly, leaving such a share of his property to his nephew's child, as enabled Jaspar Gordon to live in tolerable comfort with the daughter, whose happiness he had so mercilessly sacrificed. A wasted, peevish, and egotistical invalid was now the only half-repentant prodigal. His mind, at no time remarkable for strength, had never quite recovered the shock of Charley Seymour's violent death, and the constant attention required by her exacting parent might be classed as among the daily trials of Zoe Gordon's life.

The short winter's day (after Sister Marie had bidden the patient girl good-night) was drawing to a close, when a gentle knocking at the door caused Zoe to stop in her evening task of reading aloud to selfish Jaspar Gordon. The seeker for admittance was not kept waiting long, for in a few minutes the Irish "help," Katie by name, announced aloud, "a gentleman to see Miss Zoe."

He stood there in the dusky twilight, a tall, bearded man, whom, at first sight, she failed to recognize; but when he spoke, suspense was over, for Zoe knew at once the voice of Alfred de Rouvray.

He came towards her with a low obeisance, and holding in his hand a letter.

"De la part de ma sœur, Pauline," he said. *"Si mademoiselle veut bien me permettre de —"*

He had no time to lengthen out his speech, for she whom he addressed was so taken by surprise, that, without a moment given to thought, she took his hands in hers, and drawing him towards the window, she scanned his well-known features with eager, half-shy welcome.

"And is this really you?" she cried. "You, my own Pauline's brother — you, who were so good to me in the glad days gone by! Ah, this is kind! Father," she continued, turning to Jaspar Gordon, who sat comfortably ensconced in a rocking-chair, with a showily embroidered smoking cap set jauntily on one side of his iron-grey curls, and wrapped in a loose dressing gown of many colours. "Father, this is Monsieur de Rouvray, my friend Pauline's brother. You have often heard me speak of him, and of the happy time I spent at Pennevic. He was very, very kind to me in those well-remembered days — days when I never thought to —"

She tried to finish her introduction with conventional propriety, but the effort to speak calmly ended, as such efforts often did with Zoe, now, in tears.

He had a *tactful* heart — let me coin a word to characterize this serious, tender-feeling Frenchman; and while he dwelt upon his sister's letter, and his parents' earnest wish that Zoe should leave the country of her birth for France and their cool, pleasant Brittany, he breathed no word of his own deeper, warmer wishes.

For several days after his arrival, he was a frequent visitor to the small suburban house in which the Gor-

dons lived, and more than once Zoe had met him (accidentally, she thought), when, accompanied by Sister Marie, she was acting her self-chosen part of visitor to the poor and suffering.

Alfred de Rouvray had undertaken the voyage across the Atlantic after the receipt of a letter from Zoe, telling, in rapturous terms, that she was free. A hope had gleamed upon him then, that perhaps there was a chance for him to find, amidst the broken ruins of that chattered heart, some precious relics to be garnered in his own for ever, and so he came to seek her — long in vain — and when he found his cherished idol, she was, alas! so crushed by overwhelming sorrow, that, as I have said, her mind retained for a brief space, no memory of the past.

When he heard this, and the sad story of Zoe's great bereavement, Alfred resolved to wait — aye, even though his stay were lengthened out to years, till the poor stricken spirit should either sink beneath its trials, or stirred by the returning flow of health and strength, should see even in this world of care and sorrow — something to make life precious to her still.

He waited long and the reward came at last — came, when first a happy natural smile burned over Zoe's face when speaking of the Old World, and of a future to be spent across the wide Atlantic, with the friends she loved. Then, and not till then, Alfred ventured to urge the invitation he had come charged with; and then it was that he made a strong appeal to Jaspar Gordon in favour of the migration which he

soon persuaded the invalid he was strong enough to undertake. He had many arguments to produce in favour of his plan, among which not the least powerful was the state of impending war between the Northern and the Southern States.

"And in case of the outbreak which must soon ensue," said Alfred, "surely, if they possess not powerful protectors, this is no place for feeble women! Dark days of trouble are at hand, when I foresee the blue sky overhead will be obscured, and, as it were, 'flecked with blood;' when brother shall rise against brother, and the father against the son, and who can say — you will not believe it to be possible, you Southerners, who have seen but the best side of negro character — but still, perhaps, stirred to vengeance by their unscrupulous and false Northern friends, the coloured millions may,

"Like lions after slumber,
In unvanquishable number
Shake their chains to earth like dew
Which in sleep has fall'n on you,
For they are many — ye are few.'"

"Ay, few indeed," he continued, "on the distant plantations would be those who, in the event of a rising of the slaves, would be able to rush to the rescue of the hapless ones exposed to the wild fury of the negroes; for once excited by the intrigues of a barbarous and hypocritical policy — once their evil passions roused by every vile incentive, and with weapons placed within their lawless hands, is it probable that any defenceless creature will escape unscathed from out their hands?"

"I would stake my life," said Davenport Seymour,

who chanced to be present when this opinion was enunciated by De Rouvray, "that the negroes will never rise against the Southerners in favour of those whom they consider their worst and cruellest enemies. That the quickly-coming tempest may be as a trumpet-note heralding the eventual emancipation of the negro race, I both hope and believe. If, however, the Northern politicians imagine that this freedom is to be partly obtained through the 'rising,' so often anticipated in their calculations for the future, they will find themselves mistaken. Southern blood may be poured out like water, but it will not be by those who owe us fealty, to say nothing of goodwill; and arm the negroes, though these Northern schemers may, I, for one, engage that by their own free will, not a negro we possess will ever do a deed of violence against his master."

"But, surely," said De Rouvray, "England and Europe will not look calmly on while even the chance of such 'rising' exists. Surely England —"

"England will do nothing," broke in Davenport, "as long as this 'Slave Power' exists. Nor do I believe that, even were our negroes (maddened by drink and lust) to perpetrate acts of barbarity, such as were committed on English subjects in the recent Indian Mutiny, England would move an inch either to avert or to avenge such deeds. No; believe me, that as long as the name of slave-owners disgraces our brave, and in other respects chivalrous, people — our women's and our children's blood might cry to the mother-country for her aid, but cry in vain."

"These are gloomy prophecies," said Monsieur de Rouvray, "and all tending to strengthen my arguments in favour of a home in Europe for friends who have no ties to bind them here."

"But we are not living on a distant plantation," broke in peevish Jaspar, who was in the habit of putting in *mal à propos* observations when they were the least expected or required.

"True," said Seymour, "but although you and Miss Gordon may, when the war breaks out, be living in the comparative safety that the city affords, it does not follow that Monsieur de Rouvray's opinion is to be set at nought. The coming struggle will be no contest of a day, but one, to my thinking, for years and years to come; and every patriot, whether man or woman, will be ready to bear a willing part in the great cause for which our swords may soon be drawn."

"You will have to fight your ground inch by inch, if I mistake not," said Alfred de Rouvray; "and till at last you shall 'ride victorious' over that which is your own."

Zoe's spirit caught the glow of enthusiasm which beamed from De Rouvray's animated face.

"We shall never yield, we Southerners," she said, "even though our people should wade ankle deep in blood to victory; but we shall have peace at last," she added, in a lower tone, one indeed which rose hardly above a whisper as she quoted the poet's words of promise —

"Peace! When no longer from the brazen portals
The blast of war's great organ shakes the skies;
But beautiful as songs of the Immortals,
The holy melodies of love arise!"

CHAPTER LI.

“Glory, glory, glory,
To those who have greatly suffered and done;
Never name in story
Was greater than that which ye shall have won;
Conquerors have conquered their foes alone,
Whose revenge, pride, and power they have overthrown,
Ride ye, more victorious, over your own.”

SINCE the speaking of Seymour's gloomy prophecies — prophecies which were as the echo of a thousand tongues — two years had nearly run their wonted course. Zoe Gordon and her father bore no part in the gigantic tragedy which may almost be said to have one hemisphere for its stage, another for its *salle de spectacle*, whilst the *dramatis personæ* engaged in this protracted drama may be reckoned up by millions.

In the pleasant little French bathing-place called Ingonville, and in a cheerful cottage looking down from the heights above the sea on the busy town of Havre, the Octaroon listened with never-dying interest to the details of the mighty war raging beyond the broad Atlantic. There was some pride lingering in that chastened heart, for she could triumph in the chivalrous deeds and patriotic courage of her fatherland, contrasting it with the atrocious acts of barbarity which have cast a deep and never-to-be-washed-out stain upon the arms and policy of the Federal Government. During those memorable years Zoe Gordon received many letters from her true friend, Davenport Seymour; and in them he did not fail to remind her

of the fact, that though, even as he had foretold, the unjustifiable act of arming the negroes had been perpetrated, and although the Northerners had done their best to excite the worst passions of the slaves against their masters, the former had shown no signs of a desire to avenge the wrongs so often dilated on by their so-called defenders.

"The world must know by this time," Seymour wrote, "that the watchword of *Abolition* is merely used to conceal the real intentions of the unprincipled Northern politicians. Often as we have talked over the moral cruelties exercised towards the coloured population in the North, even I was scarcely prepared for the amount of calamity which the temporary success of the Federals has entailed upon the blacks. The late massacre, as we may well call it, of these unhappy people in New York must, I imagine, be instrumental in opening the eyes of those who still believe that social equality, as regards either civil or religious liberty, will ever be accorded to the free negroes in the North. That the Federals will fight, even as we shall do, to the death, I have no doubt; for well do these boastful Yankees know, that, unless with their foreign mercenaries they can regain possession of our fertile country, their prosperity is gone for ever, and their name as a 'people' may as well be blotted out at once from the lists of the world's nations."

Zoe read this letter aloud to her two ever-welcome visitors — one of whom, however (albeit the missive was currently translated into French), did not appear to take any marked interest in its contents.

“*Mais*,” said the one who *did* follow the sense of Seymour’s words, “*mais, dis donc, ma chérie*, what has become of *le monstre* — that dreadful Monsieur Morse. Has he been shot in a battle? I hope it — though that death would be by much too good for him.”

Pauline — for the reader has, of course, recognized in the speaker, Zoe’s early friend — was a wife and mother now, and it was the little son of a certain *jeune baron*, mentioned honourably years before to her exiled Chérie, who now sat upon his young mother’s lap and played with her glittering *châtelaine*.

“I have only heard once, and that was nearly a year ago,” replied Zoe, “of that wicked man, and then Mr. Seymour wrote that he had grown very rich, by being what, I believe, they call a contractor, and —”

“Selling shoddy coats and paper shoes,” laughed Alfred de Rouvray, who had come upon the two friends unawares as they sat beneath the spreading branches of a tall catalpa-tree. “There are many such ‘patriots’ in the Federal army — men who fatten upon the blood of fallen men, and enjoy luxuries innumerable at the expense of the widow’s and the orphan’s tears.”

He took his nephew in his arms as he ceased

speaking, and to Pauline's great delight invited Zoe to assist in swinging the little fellow in an *escarpolette*, which was placed between two lime-trees at the further extremity of the garden. They were near enough for Madame la Baronne, who watched them in her quiet, unsuspected way, to see the frequent blush deepen on Zoe's cheek, while Alfred, with the merry child between them, whispered words, telling — the true friend doubted not — of his so-long-concealed and faithful love.

The shadows had lengthened on the grass, and the tired child had already in his small cot been more than an hour asleep, when Zoe — a tender smile blending with the tears that busy memory called up to her eyes — laid her fair head on Pauline's breast, and called her "sister."

The long-tried wanderer could not choose but mourn when thinking of the distant graves of those for whom her exiled spirit had long wept and sighed; but still she smiled, for on *this* side of the moonlit sea she owned the treasure of a living love, and then,

"Like music by the night wind sent
Through strings of some still instrument,"

Hope whispered to her of a blissful future, both in the life that now is, and in the path leading us to higher destinies in the world beyond the grave.

THE END.

Zoe's 'Brand'

Bd.: 2

Leipzig 1864

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